



A Comparative Study of Bishop Joseph Butler and Wang Yang-ming's Conception of Conscience

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**A Comparative Study of
Bishop Joseph Butler's and Wang Yang-ming's (王阳明)
Conception of Conscience**

A thesis presented

by

Peter T. C. Chang

To

The Faculty of Harvard Divinity School

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Theology

In the subject of

Comparative Religion

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**A Comparative Study of
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Abstract

This dissertation is a comparative study of the Anglican Bishop Joseph Butler's (1692–1752 AD) and the Neo-Confucianist Wang Yang-ming's (王阳明) (1472–1529 AD) conception of conscience (or in Wang's terminology, *liang-chih* (良知)).

Conscience, for Butler and Wang, is the supreme moral guide, signifying the individual person's moral autonomy. Yet human remain fallible leading Butler and Wang to warn that unless carefully nurtured, conscience may yet become weakened or even buried. Therefore Butler's and Wang's moral appeal is the recurring call to conscientiousness and to exhort their fellow humankind to diligent moral cultivation.

In comparing Butler and Wang this study shows they possess complex differences and important similarities. In the first instance there are marked variances, for example, while affirming the supernatural realm they diverge radically in their specific depiction of the transcendent. They also differed in moral cultivation with Butler's emphasis on 'cool reflection' while Wang focus more on the senses. Differences notwithstanding Butler and Wang share important semblances. Their modes of deliberation reveal familiar patterns,

e.g., assertions of prima facie truth, decisions guided by consequences, recognition of primary and secondary norms etc. There are also intriguing parallels in their prognosis of erroneous teachings. Butler's critique of Hobbes and Wang's repudiation of the Mohists, show their unified concern to defend a sanguine interpretation of human nature. Butler's refutation of the Deists and Wesley, and Wang's criticism of Chu Hsi and the Buddhist, underscores their common struggle over the perennial dialectical tension of reason and sense.

In addition this dissertation shows that Butler's and Wang's conception of conscience, and by extension the moral self, have critical nuances. This is evident specifically in their thicker rendition of human flourishing, i.e., their more intricate view of what constitute the Christian and *Chun Tzu*. However they also share crucial similarities especially in their thinner account of moral self, i.e., their expectation that humankind ought to conform to a set of basic values. In sum this thesis argues that while Butler and Wang possess critical thick differences they also affirm thin similarities that are equally vital.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Human communities exist on the basis of accepted rules governing behavior. Yet ascertaining what constitutes the appropriate code of conduct remains a contentious subject for any society. The collective body has to deal with disputed questions ranging from a person's particular choice of practices (e.g., abortion or polygamy) to general conceptual debates over belief systems (e.g., whether the moral order is predetermined by God). Through the ages, diverse philosophical and religious traditions, such as those of Ancient Egypt and Greece, the Judeo-Christian traditions, as well as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, have sought to discern the values needed to maintain a stable and harmonious communal order. In the earliest parts of their history, the world's major traditions in the relative isolation of their respective contexts formulated specific moral values considered essential for their particular community's well-being. While largely oblivious to each other's efforts, the various traditions did not make their advances in moral formation completely without external influences. Historical studies, textual analysis, and anthropological research have uncovered evidence of lending and borrowing between traditions as they developed their moral ideas. St. Paul's systemization of Christian theology is a case in point, as Greek philosophical influence is clearly discernible.

To be sure, these cross-cultural exchanges in their earliest forms were mostly local interactions between neighboring traditions, e.g., the ancient Egyptians and the Hebrew faith, Christianity and Greek philosophy, Hinduism and Buddhism, and Confucianism and Taoism. Later, however, these interactions began to take on an intercontinental dimension. As the spirit of adventure drove some enterprising humans to

traverse greater geographical distances, these pioneers carried their respective moral traditions to new cultural territories. Marco Polo's odyssey along the Silk Road into Yuan China marked one of the earliest meetings of the Christian West and Confucian East. Merchants of the Arabian Peninsula plowing the trade routes in the Indian Ocean introduced Islam to then predominantly Hindu Southeast Asia. Of course, these initial encounters of the world's major traditions were not without animosity. Marco Polo had his share of missteps in the Chinese imperial courts, and it took considerable perseverance on his part before the Yuan rulers' favors were restored. The Buddhist migration across the central Asian plains to China is another interesting episode. After enduring a series of serious setbacks, Buddhism over time assimilated into the Confucian-dominated landscape, transforming itself into a form with indigenous Chinese features distinct from its Indian origins.

In today's age of globalization, the interactions of the world's major traditions continue apace. These meetings have produced, in some contemporary religious adherents, an expressed commitment to a respectful, pluralistic coexistence. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is one embodiment of this aspiration, seeking to unify the global community around a set of common standards. However, not all share such a sanguine outlook, and elements of the contemporary religious order, e.g., sectarians and fundamentalists, have displayed only contempt for others and even stoked up the threat of a clash between civilizations.

Today's reality of globalization presents the world's religious traditions with exciting prospects for more profound mutual understanding that would enrich humanity.

This expectation is nevertheless laden with perils, and the possibility for conflict is real and imminent. Do human civilizations possess the capability for harmonious co-existence, or is a clash of fundamental values inevitable? If the sanguine outlook is affirmed, then what indeed should constitute the common good that binds humankind together? The challenges in defining the specifics and enforcing the particulars that will ensure a stable and dignified global order remain complex.

A) Overview of the Dissertation Project

Amid today's anxiety over the state of cross-cultural interactions, one relationship that commands important attention is the East-West one, and in particular the Confucian and Christian relationship. The history of Confucian-Christian encounters can be traced from the arrival of the Nestorians during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) to the efforts of the Jesuit order during the Ming and Ching eras (around 1550–1700 CE), the Protestant missionary movement of the 19th century, and continuing through to the present day. In terms of scholarship, significant efforts have been made to build a common understanding between these two ancient traditions, especially through the translation of writings and the cross-fertilization of ideas. This work has laid critical groundwork for the Confucian-Christian relationship. Nevertheless, the quest for mutual comprehension remains unfinished.

This dissertation represents one effort to continue this process of deepening Confucian and Christian perceptions of one another. I plan to do this by presenting a comparative study of two historical thinkers, the Anglican bishop Joseph Butler (1692–1752 CE) and the Neo-Confucianist Wang Yang-ming (王阳明) (1472–1529 CE). Butler

and Wang are chosen because they were ardent apologists, defenders of their faiths, as it were, against the diluting influence of heterodoxy upon Christianity and Confucianism. In this regard, they present an interesting sample for a comparative study of Christianity and Confucianism. To be sure, their views represent only two strands within these ancient and complex traditions. Nevertheless, Butler and Wang are sophisticated representatives of their traditions and thus offer a fascinating study of the similarities and differences in the Christian and Confucian worldviews.

Butler's and Wang's signature contributions to the Christian and Confucian traditions are their unique expositions of conscience and *liang-chih* (良知), respectively. (Wang's invocation of *liang-chih* is generally understood as an elaboration of Mencius' seminal notion of *hsin* [心], and *liang-chih* has been variously translated as "pristine knowledge," "clear knowing," and "conscience"; in this study, *liang-chih* will be referred to as and used interchangeably with "conscience.") Butler and Wang asserted that human conscience represents the individual's authoritative guide to right and wrong. Yet they warned that conscience is not infallible, and unless people heed its dictates and are diligent in self-cultivation, it may yet become "asleep" or "buried." Thus, Butler's and Wang's contributions were also directed at organizing a self-cultivation program and securing a broader moral order that would ensure that people are schooled in sound teaching. To that end, they devoted considerable energy to refuting the erroneous doctrines of their moral adversaries: Butler confronted Thomas Hobbes, the Deists, and John Wesley, while Wang challenged the Mohists, Chu Hsi, and the Buddhists.

I begin this dissertation with an analysis of Butler and Wang in their historical contexts. Chapter 2 (Bishop Joseph Butler's vision of the Christian order) is an exegesis of Butler's moral project in 18th century England, and Chapter 3 (Wang Yang-ming's vision of the Confucian order) is an exposition of Wang's moral response to the challenges he faced in 16th century Ming China. In explicating Butler's and Wang's views, I focus on how they conceptualized the moral self and in particular their elaborations of conscience and *liang-chih* as the supreme guide. My analysis also concentrates on Butler's and Wang's efforts to set up self-cultivation programs, with particular attention given to their arguments against their opponents.

The dissertation's main goal is to compare Butler's Christian and Wang's Confucian moral projects. Chapter 4 brings the two thinkers and traditions into conversation, and my aim is to analyze descriptively the similarities and differences in their diverse traditions. The comparison focuses on two unique parallels. The first is Butler's and Wang's analogous expositions of conscience and *liang-chih*. Their discussions of conscience offer a fascinating comparison of the Christian and Confucian conceptions of the human self. The second is the shared patterns in Butler's and Wang's moral concerns. In a way, when Butler opposed Hobbes and Wang opposed the Mohists, they were confronting a common adversary, for both opponents challenged the thinkers to articulate arguments about the proper interpretations of nature and human nature. Moreover, Butler's refutation of the Deists and Wesley and Wang's critique of Chu and the Buddhists reflected a shared concern about the need to balance the often competing powers of reason and sense or emotion.

Beyond the historical and comparative analyses, this dissertation will also attempt a hypothetical study involving Butler and Wang. Chapter 5 (Butler, Wang, and the Contemporary Order) examines how the two thinkers can inform discussion on present-day moral challenges. I address the contemporary angst over the often delicate relationships between civilizations with an inquiry into how Butler and Wang, and by proxy the Christian and Confucian traditions, would relate to each other. I set Butler and Wang in an imaginary encounter with one another and assess how they would evaluate each other's moral efforts.

I begin the dissertation with a review of the methodological debate in the discipline of Comparative Religious Ethics.

B) The Comparative Religious Ethics (CRE) Methodological Debate

The comparative study of religion has provided a forum for inter-religious conversations. And under its broad curriculum is the sub-discipline of comparative religious ethics (CRE). Since its inception, CRE has been at the vanguard of efforts to discern whether a common ethical framework exists. In this endeavor, CRE over the past few decades has been debating the methodology with which to determine whether and to what extent there are shared values among diverse traditions. This CRE debate has proven to be spirited and contentious.

B1) Points of Contention: Discovered and Developed Schools

CRE's main task is to decipher the ethical systems, the character and structure of moral reflection, in different traditions. Therefore, the corresponding contentions pertain

to the elaboration of this framework. Arguments over what constitute the character and structure have divided the CRE discipline into two camps, what I shall call, the *discovered* and *developed* schools.

The *discovered* school asserts that a human ethical system is founded on the existence of a priori norms. Adherents believe that human moral conduct is guided by certain pre-existing moral values that are independent of historical developments. At the comparative level, this school assumes that diverse moral traditions possess inherent commonalities, i.e., shared beliefs prior to any mutual contact. For example, it has been argued that the Confucian and Christian traditions have separately avowed the doctrine of human dignity without influence from each other's ideas. Such a common affirmation, according to the *discovered* school, testifies to the fact of pre-existing norms. And as diverse traditions are deemed to already subscribe to these beliefs, the *discovered* school thus concludes that there is justification to enforce them because of natural consensus, e.g., all traditions can be expected to respect the dignity of all humankind.

The *developed* school claims that a human ethical structure is built on a posteriori norms. Adherents believe that moral deliberations are informed by moral values that are wholly the product of historical happenings. At the comparative level, this school argues that diverse traditions do not have inherent commonalities. Nevertheless, they do have the capacity, over time, to develop common understanding. For instance, the Confucian and Christian traditions may hold opposing views on polygamy, but in ensuing exchanges they can eventually reach a unified opinion, e.g., regard the practice as immoral. In this instance, they are deemed to have *developed* a shared moral stance on a particular issue.

And as diverse traditions initially hold divergent opinions but through mutual influences agree on a set of binding standards, the enforcement of these norms, the *developed* school asserts, is contingent on the parties' *developed* consensus, e.g., their continuing reproof of polygamy.

B2) Levels of Contentions: Descriptive and Normative

The divide between the *discovered* and *developed* schools lies at the heart of CRE contentions. The arguments for or against their opposing views are in turn waged at two levels: descriptive and normative.

B2.1) Descriptive Level

In deciphering an ethical framework, one of the CRE analyst's goals is to ascertain and illustrate a moral tradition's ethical system. Herein lies one realm of contention. Analysts may and do disagree with each others' descriptions of a tradition's moral structure. For example, the structure of the Confucian moral order remains a subject of divergent interpretations. In *Thinking from the Confucius*, Roger Ames and David Hall provide a detailed and influential elucidation of the Confucian order. The task at hand, as they see it, is to decide between two options:

“The question we shall ultimately address is whether Confucius' concept of order is one which requires coordination of individuals in conformity with objective laws and modes of relatedness or if this thinking presupposes a preference for 'aesthetic order,' involving the emergence of a complex whole by virtue of the insistent particularity of constituent details.” (Ames and Hall, 1987, p. 134)

The differences in these two orders are explained further:

“The process of rationalization tends towards uniformity and pattern regularity; the aesthetic tendency challenges this direction through its preference for uniqueness and pattern nonregularity.” (Ames and Hall, 1987, p. 136)

The authors conclude that the Confucian tradition is of the aesthetic order, that is to say of the *developed* model, according to this dissertation's classification. Joseph Needham, in *Human Law and the Law of Nature in China and the West*, offers a different read, perceiving in the Confucian order a layout of the natural law.

“The Legalists laid all their emphasis on positive law, which was to be the pure will of the lawgiver . . . As against this the Confucians adhered to the body of ancient custom, usage and ceremonial, which . . . unnumbered generations of Chinese people had instinctively felt to be right—this is the *li*, and we may equate it with the natural law.” (Needham, 1951, p. 176)

The natural law tradition, as Needham understood it, assumes the existence of a priori norms. Thus the Confucian order may be categorized as of the *discovered* model.¹ In Ames and Hall and Needham, we see diverse understandings of the Confucian order. Indeed, scholars do differ and disagree with each other's descriptive accounts of various moral traditions.

B2.2) Normative Level

Beyond the descriptive level, the CRE project may also take on normative interests. Here the analysts would render value judgments on whether an ethical norm or moral tradition represents *the* correct mode of ethical reflection. Without question such evaluations have generated vigorous if not vehement arguments. One of the most prominent voices from the *developed* school side is that of Richard Rorty. Truth, says Rorty, is relative.

“Grant that ‘true’ is an absolute term, its conditions of application will always be relative. For there is no such thing as belief being justified *sans phrase*—justified once and for all—for the same reason that there is no such thing as a belief that

¹ For other scholarship that presents the “*discovered*” model perspective on Confucianism, see Randall Preenboom's *Law and Morality in Ancient China* (1993).

can be known, once and for all, to be indubitable . . . There are no beliefs that can be known to be immune to all possible doubt.” (Rorty, 1998, p. 2)

For Rorty, any ethical model that presumes the existence of a priori norms, i.e., the discovery model, is misguided.² In Ronald Green, one encounters an opposite point of view. Asserting the Kantian perspective, Green claims that there are objective norms and that these universal patterns are discernable in the world’s diverse moral traditions.

“We shall see that this universal structure of moral decision making is a key element of the deep structure of religious thought. Whatever their specific teachings, religions agree on the basic rules of morality. All prohibit wanton killing or injury of other persons . . . all condemn deception and the breaking of solemn promises.” (Green, 1988, p. 11)

For Green, there are absolute moral imperatives, operative at all times and in all places. Moral traditions that fail to recognize these universal values are indeed mistaken.³ Thus in Rorty and Green we meet scholars who advance value judgments that normatively approve or disapprove one particular school of thought or another.

B3) Analysis of the Normative Debate

While the CRE debate is conducted at both the descriptive and normative levels, the latter discourse has proven to be the more ardent and passionate. In part, normative arguments deal with more immediate issues at hand and thus greater costs are at stake. In light of today’s quest for a global ethical order, evaluative questions have taken on an urgent and critical tone. What should form the substantive content of this order? And how should one process and ascertain these binding values? The deliberation over what these

² See also Jeffrey Stout’s CRE essays that defend the *developed* model with a sharp and pointed refutation of the *discovered* school: “Weber’s Progeny, Once Removed,” *Religious Studies Review* 6, no. 4, p. 289-295 (1980), *Ethics After Babel* (1988), and “Holism and Comparative Ethics: A Response to Little,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 11, no. 1, p. 301-315 (1983).

³ See also Green’s *Religious Reason: The Rational and Moral Foundations of Religious Beliefs* (1978).

values are and how they are determined may be boiled down to the debate over emphasis: how much weight should be accorded to the *discovered* or *developed* norms? This dispute has been framed alternatively as the universalist versus contextualist dialectic. To begin, both camps recognize the roles of *discovered* and *developed* norms. They nevertheless have different emphases, with the universalist giving greater attention to identifying pre-existing values and the contextualist to socially constructed norms.

For the contextualist, pre-existing values are important but evolving norms are more salient. Discovered values are straightforward and, according to the contextualists, are in general given and plain, requiring no further attention (for example, the injunction to be compassionate). The real task at hand is to understand the *developed* norms, i.e., those values that are being formed. Therefore, the CRE normative project should set its focus on these evolving values, and it is in the rich and diverse ongoing practical elaboration of the general principles that moral traditions can derive the more significant and critical lessons from each other.

The universalists would not dispute the contextualists' call for a focus on pressing concerns pertaining to evolving *developed* norms. Nevertheless, the universalists would add that equal attention should be directed to the *discovered* norms. Granted, the *discovered* norms are established standards and in some ways present fewer points of contention between diverse traditions; yet, they are deemed by moral traditions to be foundational and are enforced accordingly. Therefore, the comparative project, say the universalists, ought to devote balanced attention to both the evolving *developed* norms and the pre-existing *discovered* norms.

The contextualists and universalists place different emphases on the *developed* and *discovered* norms, and herein lies their key concern with each other's normative approach to formulating a cross-cultural ethical order.

In the contextualists' opinion, the universalists' emphasis on *discovered* norms is excessive and can impair their CRE effort. The primary task of CRE, according to the contextualists, is to develop shared values across diverse traditions and this calls for a delicate procurement of consensus. In the contextualists' view, the universalists' preoccupation with pre-existing norms undermines their sensitivity to context and may lead to their overstating the existence of *discovered* values. At the normative level, this would cause moral traditions to become vulnerable to a presumptuous imposition of values on others. For example, consider the controversy surrounding female circumcision; how should an outside observer react to such a contentious practice? In the contextualists' assessment, the universalists, due to their inattention to contextual nuances, are more prone to a hasty imposition of their views, e.g., to condemn female circumcision. For the contextualists, the universalists need to mitigate their fixation on *discovered* norms with greater cultural sensitivity and temper their inclination to rash judgments with more restrained and consensus-driven opinions.

For the universalists, there are pre-existing values that need to be enforced. In their view, the contextualists' emphasis on developing norms through consensus would make them more liable to missing certain values that are of the *discovered* genre. At the normative level, this would result in the failure of a moral tradition to defend values that ought to be upheld. For example, how should one react to the continuing tribal practice of

honor killing, i.e., the extra-judicial slaying of one's female relation on charges of immoral behavior? For the universalists, such an act ought to be condemned categorically regardless of tribal consent, and in their assessment, the contextualists, due to their reluctance to offend the sensibilities of other traditions and their inclination to seek consent, are more likely to fail to censure such a blatant wrong. For this reason, a stronger affirmation of *discovered* norms and a readiness to act regardless of consent would move the contextualists to a swifter and more resolute response toward a practice that should be condemned universally.

B4) Review of the CRE voices

CRE debates have generated a broad range of views and these divergent voices may be broadly categorized into the *developed*-contextualist and *discovered*-universalist schools. On the one side are Alasdair MacIntyre, Jeffrey Stout, Charles Taylor, Lee Yearley, Aaron Stalnaker, and others advancing with differing emphases the *developed*-contextualist point of view. And on the other side are Ronald Green, Alan Donagan, and David Little and Sumner B. Twiss, among others, representing with some variations the *discovered*-universalist position.⁴ In their contributions to the CRE debate, some thinkers present both descriptive and normative arguments (Lee Yearley) while others advance only normative (Jeffrey Stout) or descriptive (Little and Twiss) assertions. In the following, I will review two influential voices on either side of the CRE debate: Lee Yearley versus David Little and Sumner B. Twiss.

⁴ In *Comparative Ethics in North America: Methodological Problems and Approaches* (2000), Thomas Lewis presents an updated review of the current CRE methodological debate. Lewis's survey places the diverse voices and methodologies represented in the CRE discipline in the broad universalist and contextualist spectrum.

B4.1) Lee Yearley⁵

In his 1990 work *Aquinas and Mencius*, Lee Yearley begins his comparative project with a theory on human deliberation and presents a moral framework consisting of three parts.

The first encompasses primary theories representing moral conceptions that Yearley describes as concrete and deal with day-to-day issues (e.g., being kind,

⁵ Aaron Stalnaker's *Overcoming our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine* (2006) is a recent and important contribution to the CRE discipline. In this project, Stalnaker presents a descriptive and normative analysis of the Confucian and Christian moral visions through Xunzi and Augustine. His CRE methodology may be broadly placed under the contextualist-development model.

Stalnaker's development position is noted in his expressed affinity with Jeffery Stout's ethical approach.

"Stout's 'mild-mannered' pragmatism . . . highlights the social nature of rational justification and is more conspicuously broad-minded about which beliefs and practices might be rationally justified for conscientious beliefs, explicitly including religious ones." (p. 13)

And at the descriptive level Stalnaker aligns his preferred mode of comparison with the contextualist school.

"Careful historical contextualization and depth of treatment ward off the sorts of dubious generalization that provide more insight into the mind of the comparativist than into the different reflective modes of religious life." (p. 17)

Stalnaker also introduces what he called "bridge concepts" as the platform for comparison.

"Bridge concepts are general ideas, such as 'virtue' and 'human nature', which can be given enough content to be meaningful and guide comparative inquiry yet are still open to greater specification in particular cases." (p. 17)

Stalnaker's bridge concept is recognizably a variation of Yearley's practical theory, defined as the link between the primary and secondary theories (see section B4.1).

Stalnaker's project is an updated and valuable contribution from the contextualist-development school to the CRE field. For this dissertation's review of CRE, however, I will limit the assessment to Yearley's *Mencius and Aquinas*, as most of Stalnaker's key methodological points are reflected in Yearley's work.

compassionate, benevolent, etc.). These theories are commonly shared across cultures and

“can then be said to have a universal character; that is, they often speak in one voice, they are similar in nature and content.” (Yearley, 1990, p. 176)

Then there are secondary theories that represent more abstract concepts and deal with unusual events (e.g., the theory of relativity or beliefs about an unseen God). These theories

“usually vary enormously from culture to culture. They can be said to have an equivocal character; that is, they speak in various voices, they are dissimilar in nature and content.” (Yearley, 1990, p. 176)

Finally, there are practical theories, a middle realm where deliberations are made with reference to both primary and secondary theories. In Yearley’s account, deliberations at this level are made with a more precise application of the general principles of primary theories and are justified based on a less opaque appeal to the otherwise obscure beliefs of secondary theories. It is at this realm, says Yearley, that people and traditions begin to contemplate the fuller aspect of human flourishing.

“People who theorize on human flourishing work on the materials produced by primary theories—for example, simple human drives and fears—and they often link their theorizing with those ideas full-fledged secondary theories produce, like *chi*’ and grace. That is, they aim at a more conceptually precise ordering of human experience than does primary theory; but they stay far closer to the particular, often murky, phenomena that make up much of human life than does secondary theory.” (Yearley, 1990, p. 177)

In his study of Aquinas and Mencius, Yearley identifies the three-tiered primary, practical, and secondary theories in the two thinkers’ frameworks. He notes the shared features in Aquinas and Mencius’s primary theories.

“Mencius and Aquinas’s treatment of the role of injunctions, for instance, show clear similarities. Each thinks that humans are bound by unconditional negative obligations, such as that one ought not take innocent life without compelling reasons.” (Yearley, 1990, p. 171)

In their secondary theories, however, Yearley recognizes marked differences.

“No equivalent to Mencius’s notion of psychophysical energy that can be numinous (*chi*) exists in Aquinas, and Aquinas’s idea of grace (*gratia*) appears to resemble no concept in Mencius. Indeed these two notions seem to make sense only within each thinker’s more general framework. Mencius’s psychophysical energy requires an organismic framework as clearly as Aquinas’s grace requires a theistic one.” (Yearley, 1990, p. 170)

Yearley then concludes that due to the striking dissimilarities in Aquinas and Mencius’s secondary theories, a comparison at this level would not be illuminating. While their primary theories do present intriguing similarities, these semblances are “thin” and do not really provide for insightful comparison, either.

“Resemblances, of course, also are present in some areas. Many of them, however, are *real but thin*; that is, the resemblances are rather insignificant. They appear in an area that is so narrowly circumscribed or at a level that is so abstract that they provide us neither textured nor extensive materials on which to work.” (Yearley, 1990, p. 171)

This leads Yearley to conclude that Aquinas and Mencius’s primary and secondary theories are not the proper subjects for comparison.

“We seem to be left with the unhappy dilemma . . . On the one hand, examinations of the realm of injunctions produce real but rather unilluminating resemblances. On the other hand, examinations of ways of life produce textured accounts that usually are characterized by complex differences.” (Yearley, 1990, p. 172)

Nevertheless, all is not lost for the CRE project. Meaningful comparative work can be done at the level of practical theories. Aquinas and Mencius’s theories of virtues, Yearley submits, are set at this level. Their conceptions of moral courage employed primary theories in more concrete applications, and practical justifications were made with less obscure invocation of the secondary theories.

“Practical theory is crucial, then, to Mencius and Aquinas’s account of human flourishing. Fitting between simple primary theory and full fledged secondary theory, it differs from but relates closely, sometimes very closely, to each. We often have concentrated on their practical theories, and this focus has allowed us to make comparisons that are analogical in character. It enables us to steer

between the similarity or univocity we find in their primary theories and the differences or equivocality we often find in their secondary theory.” (Yearley, 1990, p. 180)

In analyzing Aquinas and Mencius’s notions of courage, Yearley identified interesting similarities and intriguing differences, leading him to conclude that it is at the level of practical theory that the most productive comparative work is achieved.

With his three-tiered moral framework and support from his findings from Aquinas and Mencius, Yearley submits that the CRE project should be focused on practical theory. Meaningful cross-cultural comparison lies in the middle between the superficial similarities in primary theories and the radical divergences in secondary theories. Yearley’s position is a two-sided rebuttal against those who dismiss the commensurability of diverse cultures (e.g., Alasdair MacIntyre) and those who too easily conclude that comparison can be achieved with presumed universal patterns (e.g., Ronald Green). For Yearley, one must not be content with the mere similarities of the primary theories nor be disheartened by the radical differences of the secondary theories.

In terms of the *discovered* and *developed* norms, Yearley’s view in general can be interpreted as affirming the existence of both *discovered* and *developed* similarities in diverse traditions. Yearley would nevertheless qualify this affirmation with the caution that these similarities, particularly with regard to the *discovered* norms, are thin. One needs to move beyond the *discovered* norms into the *developed* norms that provide a denser rendition of the thick conception of human flourishing in diverse traditions. Therefore, the comparative exercise has to focus on the differences and be guided by careful contextual study in order to establish cross-cultural common understanding.

B4.2) David Little and Sumner B. Twiss

In *Comparative Religious Ethics* (1978), David Little and Sumner B. Twiss open their discussion on comparative methodology with an elucidation of a framework of human deliberation. The framework consists of two distinct orders: moral and religious. The moral order deals with the general concerns of human welfare in a finite world. According to Little and Twiss, human deliberation at this level addresses the “problems of cooperation” and the “relational” aspect of the human order.

“We take a moral statement to be a statement expressing the acceptance of an action guide that claims superiority, and that it is considered legitimate, in that it is justifiable and other-regarding.” (Little and Twiss, 1978, p. 29)

The religious order deals with the specific issues of what Little and Twiss termed “problems of interpretability.” Human deliberation at this level addresses questions relating to the inexplicability of the universe, e.g., the problem of suffering, and the “sacred regarding” aspect of the human order.

“We take a religious statement to be a statement expressing acceptance of a set of beliefs, attitudes, and practices based on a notion of sacred authority that functions to resolve the ontological problems of interpretability.” (Little and Twiss, 1978, p. 56)

They then explain that human traditions possess a structure of practical justification guiding people towards the proper moral and religious responses.

“We believe it is, however, a reliable hypothesis that moral and religious discourse in various cultures proceeds according to an appellate pattern, from relatively specific prescriptions and rules to broader norms and principles of validation and, finally, to ultimate reason by which the entire system is vindicated or justified.” (Little and Twiss, 1978, p. 119)

Humankind is guided by a justification system with moral and religious validation and vindication procedures to resolve exigencies. Little and Twiss divided the validation norms into two basic types, deontological and teleological.

“Deontological norms specify certain general characteristics or conditions according to which the rightness (or wrongness) of actions is determined, without regard to the consequences produced by performing such actions. By contrast, teleological norms specify general characteristics and conditions according to which the rightness (or wrongness) of actions is determined on the basis of the consequences produced by performing these actions.” (Little and Twiss, 1978, p. 103)

And the vindication norms, they suggest, consist of three general types: consensus appeal, epistemological appeal, and general anthropological and cosmological appeal (Little and Twiss, 1978, p. 112).

Little and Twiss also explain that the system of two separate spheres of authority (i.e., moral and religious) does not always work in agreement. At times one is guided by the moral and at other times by the religious system. And in some instances one is confronted with cases where the moral and religious orders advance conflicting dictates. Herein lies the crux of the human moral dilemma.

“How, then, are we to settle which is ‘really’ and ‘finally’ and ‘ultimately’ superior?” (Little and Twiss, 1978, p. 69)

They concede that there is no standard response to such challenges.

“We contend that both moral action guides and religious action guides possess, at first view at least, priority in the ‘weak’ sense; this means that either one can be overridden in specific circumstances and for ‘good reason’ without being deprived of its title to presumptive superiority of ‘weightiness’. Having dealt with the matter of priority in this relativistic way, we suggest that the question of whether religious action guides or moral action guides take precedence can only be resolved on a case-by-case basis. In short, it is an empirical matter.” (Little and Twiss, 1978, p. 69)

Admitting that many of these contentions are resolved contextually, Little and Twiss nevertheless argue that this is not a surrender to utter disorder. While many practical decisions are contextual and contentious, human traditions do maintain a set of core moral values regarded as inviolable that serve to limit these variations.

“The concept of welfare incorporated in our definition of morality appears to have a relatively ‘fixed core’ that includes such objective conditions as physical survival, bodily and psychic health, security from arbitrary violence and the like.” (Little and Twiss, 1978, p. 69)

They then examine three diverse traditions, the Navajo Indian, ancient Christian, and Theravada Buddhist traditions. These provide evidence suggesting a shared framework with a moral and religious dichotomy, as well as a common system of practical justification. Moreover, these diverse traditions also face the dialectical challenges of reconciling moral and religious dictates.

“There is no doubt that both these emphases are present in the three traditions we examined. Nor is there any doubt that the various attempts to harmonize and integrate these emphases lie at the center of practical reflection among the Navajo, early Christians, and Theravada Buddhists.” (Little and Twiss, 1978, p. 254)

Little and Twiss add that these traditions’ efforts to reconcile the dialectic do take varied and diverse forms.

“In one way or another such pluralism is characteristic of the Navajos, the primitive Christians, and the Theravada Buddhists. In fact, part of the richness of developed practical traditions undoubtedly inheres in the elaboration and combination of various systems of validation.” (Little and Twiss, 1978, p. 118)

Notwithstanding the specific differences, they conclude that these traditions on the whole share important similarities, specifically, a validation and vindication system and a set of fixed core moral values.

With their formulation of a common moral and religious framework, supported with findings from the Navajo Indian, ancient Christian, and Theravada Buddhist traditions, Little and Twiss conclude that the CRE project is a feasible endeavor. They acknowledge that human traditions have differences, some of which are deep rooted, yet encircling these variances are important similarities. There are common patterns of justification and vindication, and it is these shared features that make the comparative

exercise possible. To be sure, these structures are filled with different contents yet for Little and Twiss it is these variances that make the comparison interesting and fruitful. While the dissimilarities need to be accounted for, they conclude that these divergences do not preclude the possibility of comparison (*vis-à-vis* MacIntyre's arguments).

In terms of the *discovered* and *developed* norms, Little and Twiss's views in general can be interpreted as affirming the existence of both *discovered* and *developed* similarities in diverse traditions. They would nevertheless qualify this affirmation with the caution that while the *developed* commonalities are to be accorded their due attention, equal importance should be directed to the *discovered* similarities. Little and Twiss's primary focus would be to confirm the pre-existing commonalities and the set of core values already shared between diverse cultures.

B5) This Dissertation and the CRE Methodological Debate

In the era of globalization, the need for a unified moral framework is becoming increasingly urgent. Therefore the normative debate on formulating a global ethical order is pertinent and critical; what should constitute the common good, and how do we forge a set of universally binding values? This comparative study of Butler and Wang will contribute to this normative debate indirectly. The dissertation's immediate goal is descriptive, to present an interpretation of Butler's Christian and Wang's Confucian moral visions and to decipher their ethical orders and illustrate how they would envision a Christian-Confucian cross-cultural norm. This study will not advance any evaluative judgment on the veracity or efficacy of any ethical norms or moral traditions. The project's contribution to the CRE field is to enhance our descriptive understanding of the

moral traditions examined. My hope is that these findings will subsequently inform and be applied to the normative quest for a global ethical order. To that end I wish to highlight this project's intended contribution to the CRE discipline by contrasting it with Yearley's, and Little and Twiss's works.

Yearley's *Aquinas and Mencius* is an influential comparison of these two seminal Christian and Confucian thinkers. My research on Butler and Wang will confirm a significant part of Yearley's findings. His descriptive categorization of Aquinas and Mencius's moral frameworks into a three-tiered order of primary, practical, and secondary theories, I will show, is also evident in Butler and Wang. My study also differs from Yearley in one key point: I plan to refute his contention that primary theories are thin and insignificant. My study of Butler and Wang will show that some of these primary theories are profound and critical. For example, in their general frameworks, Butler and Wang shared fundamental concerns about the two dialectics of reason and sense and the moral and the religious. I will argue that these similarities are complex and foundational theories that warrant greater attention than Yearley would accord them.

Little and Twiss's *Comparative Religious Ethics* is an important descriptive study of cross-cultural moral frameworks. My research on Butler and Wang does confirm Little and Twiss's main argument, namely, that discernable patterns of moral reflection exist in diverse moral traditions. Butler's and Wang's elaborations of the moral self's ethical thought processes, I will show, share sets of basic principles and modes of deliberation. But my study is in one way an improvement on *Comparative Religious Ethics*. Little and Twiss illuminated the critical but "thin" dimension of the moral self. My project will

provide a thicker descriptive account of human flourishing. I plan to give a more nuanced elaboration of moral character development and virtue cultivation. Thus my research will give a fuller analysis of Butler's and Wang's conceptual and historical moral challenges.

C) Appendix: Identifying the Sources

As a comparative study, this project is also a systematization of Butler's and Wang's moral thinking, and this effort consists of two parts. The first is an organization of what may be considered Butler's Christian and Wang's Confucian standard frameworks. The second is an elaboration of these basic structures involving interpretations and inferences made on Butler's and Wang's thought.

C1) The Framework

The arrangement of Butler's and Wang's moral views begins with their key concepts. For example, I aim to clarify that Butler's Christian and Wang's Confucian moral visions are anchored on their doctrines of the transcendent. In presenting these key features, I rely on two sources: primary and secondary.

C1.1) Primary Sources

The primary sources present Butler's and Wang's perspectives and contributions to the Christian and Confucian moral lexicons. For instance, their ascription of supreme moral authority to conscience and *liang-chih* is their distinctive input to the Christian and Confucian understandings of the moral self. In working with these materials, the task is to explain and set Butler's and Wang's ideas in the wider Christian and Confucian visions.

Specifically, these primary sources are Butler's *Fifteen Sermons* and the *Analogy of Religions* and Wang's collected works entitled *Ch'uan-hsi Lu Hsiang-chu chi-ping*, which is a compilation of short treatises and records of conversations with his students, including some of his correspondences and poems. In this dissertation, I will use J. H. Bernard's 1990 edition of *The Works of Bishop Butler, volumes 1 and 2* and Chan Wing-tsit's 1985 English translation of Wang's works, *The Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming*.

C1.2) Secondary Sources

Admittedly, Butler's and Wang's writings address only certain aspects of broader Christian and Confucian concerns; hence, additional resources are at times needed to provide conceptual background and historical context. For example, to fully comprehend Wang's understanding of *liang-chih*, one must draw on Mencius's works on *hsin* for supporting conceptual clarification. Likewise, to better appreciate Butler's notion of conscience, one must look to the 17th century English debate on reason and sense for historical perspective. When secondary sources are directly quoted, they are referenced accordingly. At times, the information is paraphrased and in these cases footnotes will indicate the title or chapter from which the material is derived.

C2) Elaborating the Framework

Beyond the standard framework, this dissertation also presents an interpretation of and draws inferences from Butler's Christian and Wang's Confucian visions. For example, I argue that the moral order in Butler's and Wang's view may be understood as

being governed from two levels. They articulate a set of norms considered to be primary and maintain another seen as secondary. Their priority is to ensure exact conformity on the former while enforcing the latter with less stringency. To be sure, Butler and Wang did not directly employ the terms “primary” and “secondary” in this manner.

Nevertheless, I hope to present these as plausible inferences consistent with their basic assumptions. In advancing these arguments to illuminate our understanding of Butler and Wang, I rely on two sources: personal interpretation and existing scholarship.

C2.1) Personal Interpretation

Some of the exposition on Butler and Wang represents my explanation of their views. For instance, I suggest that their treatment of moral challenges may be categorized into more determinate and less determinate genres. The former consists of cases where people are able to reach decisions with certainty whereas the latter involve exigencies that inevitably taint decisions with uncertainty. To be certain, Butler and Wang presented only implicit claims with regard to these different types of challenges. My contribution to the study of these two thinkers is to organize these implications into clearer categories.

C2.2) Existing Scholarship

While some of the elucidation is my own interpretation, other explications on Butler and Wang presented in this dissertation are drawn from existing scholarship. For example, in Chapter 4’s comparison of the Confucian and Christian traditions, earlier scholarship, e.g., by Julia Ching and Benjamin Schwartz, is referred to for background information and supporting arguments. And when these works are used to clarify Butler’s

and Wang's views, i.e., when quoted directly or footnoted, or paraphrased or used to serve as background information, the sources will be referenced accordingly.

Chapter 2: Bishop Joseph Butler's Conception of Conscience

After a century of turmoil, England in the early 18th century was enjoying a period of tranquility. The English political hierarchy had stabilized, with Parliament presiding over the Monarchy and the Church. Under the Lockean vision, the state carved out and secured a civil public space recognizing the Englishman's rights to hold divergent private religious views. Political pragmatism transformed England into a sanctuary of toleration, laying the framework for the eventual modern notion of the civil society. Yet in the ecclesiastical establishment's calculus, the civility earned through political compromises did not come without a moral price. Within the hallowed halls of the sanctuaries, grumbling about moral decay was growing in amplitude.

“No age, since the founding and forming of the Christian Church, was ever like, in opened avowed atheism, blasphemies, and heresies, to the age we now live in.” (Daniel Defoe, quoted in Stromberg, 1954, p. 2)

Joseph Butler's (1692–1752 AD) distinguished career as an Anglican bishop and philosopher-theologian was set in this period of political calm, which was marked nevertheless by an undercurrent of moral discontent. In his *Analogy of Religion*, Bishop Butler echoed the prevailing lamentation of an eroding reverence for the Christian faith.

“Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry; but that it is, now at length, discovered to be fictitious . . . a subject of mirth and ridicule.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. xvii)

The 17th century heralded the “Age of Reason,” but the newfound confidence in the power of the rational, in Butler's view, sowed amongst the intellectual elite an over-reliance on human mental prowess, leading to unchecked skepticism towards the Christian faith. At the pastoral level, Butler was perturbed by the pervasiveness of a petty egoism that was eroding the communal fabric.

“I am persuaded that a very great part of the wickedness of the world is, one way or other, owing to the self-partiality, self-flattery, and self-deceit, endeavored there to be laid open and explained. It is to be observed amongst persons of the lowest rank, in proportion to their compass of thought, as much as amongst men of education and improvement.” (Butler, 1900, VI, p. 14)

For Butler, the one to blame for this state of affairs was Thomas Hobbes; Hobbes’s egoistic ethics may have been ostracized conceptually from the English mind but they were not fully exorcised in practical life. In Butler’s overall diagnosis, England had strayed from the divine design and needed to be redirected to the true Christian vision. While he was one among many Anglican churchmen to speak out on these issues, Butler articulated his views with particular distinctiveness. His *Analogy of Religion* was recognized at that time as *the* apologetic defense for the essence of Christianity.⁶ And his impassioned Rolls Chapel sermons criticizing the lingering malaise of Hobbesian egoism, and in particular his invocation of conscience, were considered pastoral masterpieces. This chapter is an analysis of Butler’s reaction, as well as the general Christian response, to the moral challenges of early 18th century England.

A) *Moral Vision*

As an air of listlessness drifted across the land, the Church of England pleaded for a rekindling of Christian fervor. What was the Christian vision and how did the Anglican divines, especially Joseph Butler, present that vision to their 18th century contemporaries?

⁶ See David Brown’s *Butler and Deism*, in Christopher Cunliffe (ed.), 1992, *Joseph Butler’s Moral and Religious Thought: Tercentenary Essays* (pp. 7-28).

Butler's interpretation of the Christian vision is centered on reasserting order. In a commentary on the Stoic formula of a virtuous life lived in accord with nature, Butler remarked,

“Whoever thinks it worth while to consider this matter thoroughly should begin with stating to himself exactly the idea of a system, economy, or constitution of any particular nature, or particular anything: and he will, I suppose, find, that it is an one or a whole, made up of several parts . . .” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 7)

Nature consists of a multiplicity of parts, yet Butler argues that it is an organized and unified entity.

“Every work both of nature and of art is a system: and as every particular thing, both natural and artificial, is for some use or purpose out of and beyond itself, one may add, to what has been already brought into the idea of a system, its conduciveness to this one or more ends.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 7)

Natural or otherwise, all things are assigned a telos. And these particular goals ultimately transcend themselves to serve a greater common end. Butler's main point is that to clarify virtue's task is to discern nature's design and to bring its intended telos to pass. To be sure, Butler is mindful that the assertion of order in nature is not uncontroversial. Is it not apparent that the natural world is unregulated at best, chaotic at worst? Anticipating these skeptical dismissals, Butler alleged that such views are convincing only to the uninformed observer. Using an analogy of a watch, he explained:

“Let us instance in a watch – suppose the several parts of it taken to pieces, and placed apart from each other: let a man have ever so exact a notion of these several parts, unless he considers the respects and relations which they have to each other, he will not have anything like the idea of a watch.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 7)

To the untrained eye, the watch's dismantled components do appear to be a pile of disjointed junk.

“But let him view these several parts put together, or consider them as to be put together in the manner of a watch; let him form a notion of the relations which those several parts have to each other – all conducive in their respective ways to

this purpose, showing the hour of the day; and then he has the idea of a watch.”
(Butler, 1900, V1, p. 7)

According to Butler, in like manner, the skeptics’ dismissal of natural order is uninformed. Their view of the natural world is distracted by its surface disorderliness and misses nature’s inherent design. For Butler, nature’s exterior complexity is actually an overlying blueprint that brings the disparate units into a whole. And the goal of the virtuous life is to decipher and to live in conformity with this order in nature. Butler then elaborates that this order did not come about by chance. It is the expression of a divine Author’s deliberate will.

“These things are not, what we call accidental, or to be met with only now and then; but they are things of every day’s experience: they proceed from general law . . . by which God governs the world, in the natural course of His providence.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 42)

Nature is God’s creation. And to rebut the Deists’ pervasive view of God as remote and removed, Butler argued that the Creator is also a moral governor concerned with and engaged in the ongoing affairs of the human realm.

“Upon the whole: there is a kind of moral government implied in God’s natural government; virtue and vice are naturally rewarded and punished as beneficial and mischievous to society; and rewarded and punished directly as virtue and vice. The notion then of a moral scheme of government is not fictitious, but natural.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 66)

For Butler, this divine scheme serves a telos, i.e., the vision of a harmonious co-existence of all things. The Genesis story of Eden recounted an original pristine state of nature where creation existed in perfect order. In the human realm, God envisioned humankind, with its plurality of races, as living as one family. Against Hobbes’s contrarian view that the state of nature was fissionary and warlike, Butler appealed to St. Paul’s body metaphor (Romans 12:4-5) to press the Christian vision:

“The relation which the several parts or members of the natural body have to each other and to the whole body, is here compared to the relation which each

particular person in society has to other particular persons and to the whole society; and the latter is intended to be illustrated by the former.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 26-27)

Butler extends Paul’s analogy of the body to include the vision of all people as tied to one human community. He then reasserts the critical moral implication of this parts-and-whole relationship.

“And if there be likeness between these two relations, the consequence is obvious: that the latter show us [we were intended] to do good to others, as the former shows us that [the several members of the natural body were intended to be instruments of good to each other and to the whole body].” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 27)

As the disparate body parts tend to the whole person’s well-being so the individual life is to be lived, in the end, for the collective good. The human telos, for Butler, is to contribute to the welfare of all. And to set this process in motion God has installed a body of law in nature.

“Consider then, upon what ground it is we say, that the whole common course of Nature is carried on according to general foreordained law.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 180)

The law of nature, Butler explained, is not a set of abstract rules imposed from on high but is rather integral to the human anatomy.

“It is the inward frame of man considered as a system or constitution.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 52n)

And it functions to hold the diverse parts together.

“Whose several parts are united, not by a physical principle of individuation, but by the respects they have to each other; the chief of which is the subjection of which the appetites, passions, and particular affections have to the one supreme principle of reflection or conscience . . . Thus the body is a system or constitution: so is a tree; so is every machine.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 52n)

In a separate exposition, Butler described these laws as inscribed in human hearts and ascribed with moral authority.

“What that is in man by which he is *naturally a law to himself*, is explained in the following words: ‘which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.’” (Butler, 1900, VI, p. 44)

The notion of God’s law as carved into a person’s innermost being is a rendition of the Genesis depiction of Adam created in God’s image. In the bigger scheme of things, humans are an integral factor in the historical progression of the Christian vision. As each minute component in the watch plays a part in keeping time, likewise each individual person has a potential role in the unfolding of the divine drama. If human beings act in accord with their innate moral constitution, then harmonious co-existence will be maintained. Alas, in the Garden of Eden humanity sinned and the pristine order was disrupted. As a watch malfunctions, likewise nature and humanity have faltered. Yet, Butler asserted, there is a fundamental difference between the mechanical failure of the watch and the fall of the human.

“A machine is inanimate and passive: but we are agents. Our constitution is put in our own power. We are charged with it; and therefore are accountable for any disorder or violation of it.” (Butler, 1900, VI, p. 8)

The watch’s breakdown may be attributed to the designer, but humankind’s dereliction is not God’s fault. Humans are not machines but have an autonomous will and are thus responsible for their failure.

In summation, Butler envisions humanity as designed for harmonious co-existence, but this vision has been interrupted by sin. Nevertheless, humans retain the potential to restore the original state of tranquility. The task is to recover from the fall and bring to pass creation’s intended telos. Unlike the watch, humanity is a work in progress and if each person would obey the dictates of conscience, then, Butler believed, the vision of harmonious co-existence would be realized.

B) The Christian

The individual person, in Butler's scheme, has a crucial role in the divine telos. If people act in conformity with their innate constitution, then the vision of a harmonious order will be actualized. To that end Butler's project was focused on cultivating the ideal moral self, i.e., the Christian, one who lives true to the law of nature and masters the skills to realize God's plan. In the preface to the *Fifteen Sermons*, Butler framed the challenges at hand in this manner:

“Now morals, considered as a science, concerning which speculative difficulties are daily raised, and treated with regard to those difficulties, plainly require a very peculiar attention. (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 2)

The quest for moral acumen, Butler cautions, is a painstaking endeavor.

“For here ideas never are in themselves determinate, but become so by the train of reasoning.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 2)

The subjects of inquiry are complex and the search for understanding entails disciplined deliberations. Butler then injects a diagnosis of the prevailing moral condition: the current dismal state of affairs is the direct result of the general lack of rigor in reflection.

“. . . people habituate themselves to let things pass through their minds, as one may speak, rather than to think of them. Thus by use they become satisfied merely with seeing what is said, without going any further. Review and attention, and even forming a judgment, becomes fatigue; and to lay anything before them that requires it, is putting them quite out of their way.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 2)

Therefore for Butler the remedy to the pervasive apathy is to reinvigorate critical thinking.

And Butler's exhortation to a “reflective” life, I submit, may be viewed in terms of equipping the self with two types of skills: conceptual astuteness and practical wisdom.

B1) Conceptual Knowledge

Butler's *Analogy of Religion* is an apologetic defense of Christianity. In an advertisement for the *Analogy*, he lamented how Christianity was ridiculed as fictitious and mythical. He thus set out to argue the Christian case, expressing confidence that if the evidence is presented properly, then

“. . . any reasonable man, who will thoroughly consider the matter, may be as much assured, as he is of his own being, that it is not, however, so clear a case, that there is nothing in it.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. xviii)

Butler believed that when people employ sound reasoning they can and ought to be persuaded by the Christian core beliefs.

“There is, I think, strong evidence of its truth; but it is certain no one can, upon principles of reason, be satisfied of the contrary.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. xviii)

Butler's goal in the *Analogy* was to equip his readers with an aptitude for the lucid thinking necessary to achieve clear understanding of complex beliefs. It was also an effort to impart knowledge of the conceptual genre. This, I argue, represents the first of the two skills Butler envisioned in the ideal self, i.e., conceptual astuteness.

B2) Practical Knowledge

While conceptual knowledge is crucial, Butler warned that intellectual prowess is not an end in itself. It needs to be translated into practical virtue.

“Men of deep research and curious inquiries should just be put in mind, not to mistake what they are doing. If their discoveries serve the cause of virtue and religion, in the way of proof, motive to practice, or assistance in it; or if they tend to render life less unhappy, and promote its satisfactions; then they are most usefully employed: but bringing things to light, alone and of itself, is of no manner of use, any otherwise than as an entertainment or diversion.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 198)

People must apply their beliefs into practice. The virtuous life is ultimately validated by its practical consequences. For this reason Butler sought to cultivate in the Christian sound practical skills. In a charge delivered at Durham, Butler the Bishop reminded his

fellow clergy that the real challenges of Christian ministry lie primarily in the domain of the mundane.

“Nor does the want of religion in the generality of the common people appear owing to a speculative disbelief or denial of it, but chiefly to thoughtlessness and the common temptations of life.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 292)

Hence, pastoral attentions should be focused on awakening in the laity their practical responsibilities:

“Your chief business therefore is to endeavor to beget a practical sense of it upon their hearts, as what they acknowledge their belief of, and profess they ought to conform themselves to.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 292)

In the *Fifteen Sermons*, Butler set out some of these practical expectations in relational terms:

“From this review and comparison of the nature of man as respecting self, and respecting society, it will plainly appear, that there are as real and the same kind of indications in human nature, that we were made for society and to do good to our fellow-creatures; as that we were intended to take care of our own life and health and private good.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 27)

For Butler the ideal self is one who masters the art of daily living, possessing the dexterity to respond appropriately to practical exigencies. In sum, I argue that Butler’s ideal Christian possesses two distinct qualities, wisdom for conceptual elucidation and skills for practical living.

C) The Moral Anatomy

The moral self needs to acquire knowledge in order to bring the Christian vision to pass. In Butler’s scheme the faculties guiding one towards this knowledge are threefold: the principle of self-love and benevolence, several passions and affections, and conscience.

C1) Principle of Self-Love and Benevolence, Several Passions and Affections

In his sermon titled “On Human Nature,” Butler introduced the first moral guide as the principle of self-love and benevolence.

“There is a natural principle of benevolence in man; which is in some degree to society, what self love is to the individual.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 28)

The principle of self-love and benevolence (henceforth referred to as the principle) leads people to regard the interests of self and others. But there are also the several passions and affections (henceforth referred to as passion) that likewise direct people to equal regard of private and public goods.

“This will further appear, from observing that the several passions and affections, which are distinct both from benevolence and self love, do in general contribute and lead us to public good as really as to private.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 29)

Underlying Butler’s introduction of principle and passion are two sets of concerns: the explicit dialectic between public and private interests and the implicit tension between reason and sense.

C1.1) Public and Private Goods

Butler asserts that the principle and the passion, notwithstanding their differences, do lead people to shared objectives:

“All of these have a tendency to promote both public and private good, and may be considered as respecting others and ourselves equally and in common.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 31)

To be sure, the principle and passion are sometimes more inclined towards one good over the other.

“But some of them seem most immediately to respect others, or tend to public good; others of them most immediately to respect self, or tend to private good.” (Butler, 1900, VI, p. 31)

Butler then inserts a crucial qualification.

“Neither sort are instances of our love either to ourselves or others.” (Butler, 1900, VI, p. 31)

In and of themselves these inclinations, Butler says, cannot be understood merely as our care for the self and others.

“But only instances of our Maker’s care and love both of the individual and the species, and proofs that He intended we should be instruments of good to each other, as well as that we should be so to ourselves.” (Butler, 1900, VI, p. 31)

Rather, these proclivities are expressions of God’s will that we humans ought to love our fellows as we love ourselves.

While there is no ambiguity and controversy with the exhortation to love one’s neighbors as oneself, the application of this sacred command is entirely a different matter. In practice, public and private interests often collide and people are compelled to choose one over the other. The practical dilemma is to discern how to reconcile self-interest and the interests of others. Can public and private goods truly be in equipoise? Indeed, modern scholars have debated over Butler’s exact definition of the self-love and benevolence relationship. Are they of equal standing or does one rank higher than the other? The contemporary contentions present three diverse interpretations: self-love overruling benevolence, benevolence superseding self-love, or self-love and benevolence on par with each other.⁷ Butler, I submit, believed that self-love and benevolence

⁷ See R. G. Frey’s “Butler on Self-Love and Benevolence” and David McNaughton’s “Butler on Benevolence,” which are both in *Joseph Butler’s Moral and Religious Thought: Tercentenary Essays* (ed. Cunliffe, 1992, pp. 243-268, 269-292).

properly understood are not antithetical. As a matter of fact, he thought it his primary task to clarify this point.

“The chief design of the . . . discourse is to state the notion of self-love and disinterestedness, in order to show that benevolence is not more unfriendly to self-love, than any other particular affections whatever.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 16)

In a separate paragraph he provides a more emphatic explanation of their relationship:

“I must however remind you that though benevolence and self-love are different; though the former tends most directly to public good, and the latter to private: yet they are so perfectly coincident, that the greatest satisfactions to ourselves depend upon our having benevolence in a due degree; and that self-love is one chief security or our right behavior towards society.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 29)

Certainly self-love and benevolence are different in some ways, yet the genuine experience of one requires a corresponding appropriate consideration of the other. Self-love and benevolence are not mutually exclusive; when synchronized, they benefit both the self and others. Thus for Butler public and private interests properly understood are not antithetical. And when correctly practiced they ultimately serve the good of all.

C1.2) Reason and Sense

Butler’s elucidation of the moral anatomy was set against a backdrop of ongoing debate over reason and sense’s competing authorities. While Butler was not an active party in the dispute, his work does register the underlying issues. In his basic definition of moral faculties, Butler did not refer to reason and sense, yet they are mentioned in many contexts. Here is one example:

“When any of our senses are affected or appetites gratified with the objects of them, we may be said to exist or live in a state of sensation. When none of our senses are affected or appetites gratified, and yet we perceive, and reason, and act; we may be said to exist or live in a state of reflection.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 24)

There is no question that Butler at times referenced reason and sense as sources of moral perceptions. Butler’s “principle,” I submit, may be interpreted broadly as “reason” and

“passion” may be understood generally as “sense.” His careful handling of principle-reason and passion-sense does reflect the 18th century English concerns over their competing influences. Butler in general places reason and sense in a supporting relationship, i.e., each complementing the other. I will nevertheless show that Butler ultimately elevates reason’s authority over that of sense.

C1.2.1) Sense and the Limits of Reason

In 18th century England, reason’s role as a moral guide was largely uncontested; the same cannot be said concerning sense. For this reason Butler felt it necessary to state sense’s case:

“Now obligations of virtue shewn, and motives to the practice of it enforced, from a review of the nature of man, are to be considered as an appeal to each particular person’s heart and natural conscience: as the external senses are appealed to for the proof of things cognizable by them.”(Butler, 1900, V1, p. 41)

Sense, Butler says, is a viable mode of discernment, as capable as reason in providing external evidence to verify a subject. And sense’s utility, Butler adds, is not restricted to the conceptual. It also acts internally to lead a person to the appropriate practical response. Shame, Butler points out, is one expression of such practical guidance.

“And allowing the inward feeling, shame; a man can as little doubt whether it was given him to prevent his doing shameful actions, as he can doubt whether his eyes were given him to guide his steps. And as to these inward feelings themselves; that they are real, that man has in his nature passions and affections, can no more be questioned, than that he has external sense.”(Butler, 1900, V1, p. 41)

Moral sensibility, in Butler’s view, is an important source of conceptual and practical knowledge. He thus concludes:

“Since then our inward feelings, and the perceptions we receive from our external sense, are equally real; to argue for the former to life and conduct is as little liable to exception, as to argue from the latter to absolute speculative truth.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 41)

In a separate exposé on the relationship between ends and means, Butler presented sense in relation to reason, regarding the former as supplementing the latter's limitation. He begins by stating that ends are achieved through means and there are situations when less agreeable methods have been resorted to in order to achieve certain desired goals.

“As in the scheme of the natural world, no ends appear to be accomplished without means; so we find that means very undesirable often conducive to bring about ends in such a measure desirable, as greatly to overbalance the disagreeableness of the means.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 124)

Butler then explains that these exceptional means are discerned from “experiences,” a non-reason source.

“And in cases where such means are conducive to such ends, it is not reason, but experience, which shews us, that they are thus conducive.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 124)

When contrasted with reason, the “experience” that Butler invokes may be taken simply as sense. He adds,

“Experience also shews many means to be conducive and necessary to accomplish ends, which means, before experience, we should have thought, would have had even a contrary tendency.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 124)

Here Butler indicates that there are instances when sense not only supplements but also supersedes reason's dictates. Butler, I thus submit, had a respectful regard for sense vis-à-vis reason and for the role of moral sensibility in practical affairs as well as conceptual matters.

C1.2.2) Reason and the Excesses of Sense

While affirming sense's critical role, Butler is also acutely aware of its vulnerability to excesses.

“Not only in cases where they can be gratified consistently with innocence and prudence, but also in cases where they cannot, and yet can be gratified imprudently and viciously.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 70)

When applied properly, passions and appetites do advance virtue. Yet they can also induce vice when employed indiscriminately. Butler elaborates further:

“Passion inordinately excited . . . towards such objects, at such times, or in such degrees, as that they cannot be gratified consistently with worldly prudence; are temptations, dangerous, and too often successful temptations, to forego a greater temporal good for a less, i.e., to forego what is, upon the whole, our temporal interest, for the sake of a present gratification.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 71)

Unrestrained sensuality, Butler laments, leads to reckless satisfaction of immediate pleasure that compromises the longer term greater good. In one extended comparison of brutes and humans, Butler registers a similar concern over ungoverned passions.

“Suppose a brute creature by any bait to be allured into a snare, by which he is destroyed. He plainly followed the bent of his nature, leading him to gratify his appetite: there is an entire correspondence between his whole nature and such an action: such action therefore is natural.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 46)

While it is natural for a brute to be driven wholly by their sensual urges, the same cannot be said concerning humans.

“But suppose a man, foreseeing the same danger of certain ruin, should rush into it for the sake of a present gratification; he in this instance would follow his strongest desire, as did the brute creature: but there would be as manifest a disproportion, between the nature of a man and such an action, as between the meanest work of art and the skill of the greatest master in that art: which disproportion arises, not from considering the action singly in *itself*, or in its *consequences*; but from comparison of it with the nature of the agent.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 46)

To gratify passion to the detriment of one’s well-being is simply not proper to human nature.

“And such an action is utterly disproportionate to the nature of man, it is in the strictest and most proper sense unnatural; this word expressing that disproportion.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 46)

For Butler, sense has an important moral function yet its power must be harnessed. Sense disproportionately employed would harm one's good. In light of the risk and danger of "passion inordinately excited," Butler presents the following diagnosis.

"[Is] it not manifestly owing either to this, that they have not cool and reasonable concern enough for themselves to consider wherein their chief happiness . . . or else if they do consider it, that they will not act conformably to what is the result of that consideration: i.e., reasonable concern for themselves, or cool self-love is prevailed over by passion and appetite." (Butler, 1900, VI, p.36)

In Butler's judgment, sense-induced recklessness is the consequence of people's failure to employ cool reflection. Sense requires reason's oversight.

C1.2.3) Reason over Sense

For Butler, reason and sense are sources of moral guidance. Their importance is apparent in their mutually complementary roles: sense supplementing reason's limitations and reason restraining sense's excesses. In general, Butler frames reason and sense in this dialectical relationship, each serving to offset the other's constraints. In the wider 18th century English debate, the contending parties tended to take a sharper stance on reason and sense, elevating the authority of one over the other. Those advocating reason's supremacy, i.e., the rational moralist school, included the likes of Samuel Clark and William Wollaston. Those promoting the primacy of sense, i.e., the moral sense school, included the Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, and David Hume.⁸ While staying informed in this debate, Butler did not declare sides or issue explicit statements elevating one faculty over the other. Nevertheless, his overall scholarship and language, I argue, do

⁸ For more discussion on the debate between the 18th century English rational and moral sense schools, see Isabel Rivers' 1991 two-volume work *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660 – 1780* and P. Allan Carlsson's 1964 work *Butler's Ethics*, which sets Butler in the context of the larger debates.

tend towards favoring the rationalist school, conferring higher esteem to reason. In this regard, Samuel Clark's early influence on Butler is enduring.⁹ In various places, Butler ascribes to reason exclusive qualities not accorded to sense. For example, the mind is described as that

“. . . which is ‘the candle of the Lord within us.’” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 271)

At times he utters reason and conscience in the same breath, treating them as though synonymous. The next section (C2) will show that Butler's definition of conscience is often accompanied by the phrase “the principle of reflection.” In an exposé on self-deceit, Butler located reason and conscience on the same plane as casualties of moral deception,

“. . . which undermines the whole principle of good; darkens that light, that ‘candle of the Lord within,’ which is to direct our steps; and corrupts conscience, which is the guide of life.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 136)

It is evident that Butler often placed reason on a par with conscience. In one statement, he even ascribes to reason the highest of moral authority.

“I express myself with caution, lest I should be mistaken to vilify reason; which is indeed the only faculty we have wherewith to judge concerning anything, even revelation itself.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 164)

In summation, I submit that Butler never diminishes moral sensibility but clearly has a preferential consideration for reason as the higher authority in moral deliberation.

C2) Conscience

In addition to the principle of self-love and benevolence and several passions and affections, the third faculty in Butler's scheme is conscience, which he introduces thus:

“There is a principle of reflection in men, by which they distinguish between, approve and disapprove their own actions . . . This principle in man, by which he

⁹ As a young theologian, Butler became acquainted with Clark and in correspondences expressed abiding gratitude for the latter's contribution to his nascent intellectual developments (see Penelhum, 1985, pp. 1, 7, and 78).

approves or disapproves his heart, temper, and actions, is conscience. And that this faculty tends to restrain men from doing mischief to each other, and leads them to do good, is too manifest to need being insisted upon.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 32)

Later in the same sermon, Butler presents a more extended elaboration of conscience’s role within a person as that

“ . . . which passes judgment upon himself and them; pronounces determinately some actions to be in themselves just, right, good; others to be in themselves evil, wrong, unjust; which, without being advised with, magisterially exerts itself, and approves or condemns him the doer of them accordingly: and which, if not forcibly stopped, naturally and always of course goes on to anticipate a higher and more effectual sentence, which shall hereafter second and affirm its own.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 45)

Butler’s dense description of conscience, I submit, may be distilled into four distinctive features.

First, conscience is an innate moral overseer. Its presence is most noticeable when corrective measures are needed in response to wrongs committed. In the following, Butler describes conscience’s intervention in a case of inordinate passion.

“Passion or appetite implies a direct simple tendency towards such and such objects, without distinction of the means by which they are to be obtained. Consequently it will often happen there will be a desire of particular objects, in cases where they cannot be obtained without manifest injury to others.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 47)

He then adds that herein lies the moment of conscience:

“Reflection and conscience comes in, and disapproves the pursuit of them in these circumstances.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 47)

For Butler it is at such times of conflict that conscience is activated and consulted to render judgment. With conscience operating as an overseer, human deliberation may thus be understood as consisting of two phases: principle and passion provide the initial guidance and conscience is then activated when the earlier discernments err. To be certain Butler’s understanding of conscience is not limited to reacting to wrongdoing but

extends it also to verifying and justifying what is first perceived or believed to be morally right or wrong.

Second, conscience represents a higher authority and judgment. Conscience's dictates, according to Butler, embody laws that demand dutiful response.

“Your obligation to obey this law is its being the law of your nature. That your conscience approves of and attests to such a course of action, is itself alone an obligation . . . Conscience does not only offer itself to show us the way we should walk in, but it likewise carries its own authority with it, that it is our natural guide: it therefore belongs to our condition of being, it is our duty to walk in that path, and follow this guide, without looking about to see whether we may not possibly forsake them with impunity.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 54)

It is imperative, Butler asserts, to obey conscience's decree. In a separate passage, he provides some insight into conscience's intricate workings. In the first instance, when wrongs are committed, inner conflicts ensue:

“There is no man but would choose, after having had the pleasure or advantage of a vicious action, to be free of the guilt of it, to be in the state of an innocent man. This shows at least the disturbance and implicit dissatisfaction in vice.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 101)

Butler then deciphers the guilt:

“If we inquire into the grounds of it, we shall find it proceeds partly from an immediate sense of having done evil, and partly from an apprehension, that this inward sense shall one time or another be seconded by a *higher judgment*, upon which our whole being depends.” (italics added, Butler, 1900, V1, p. 101)

The inner sense of guilt emanates from a superior source. In Butler's rendition, conscience is akin to a moral reflex issuing a higher verdict carrying with it the force of a moral imperative.

Third, conscience's efficacy is holistic. While it is commonly understood to be reacting to specific misdeeds, conscience, Butler is anxious to explain, is not merely a first-aid kit. He begins with a complaint of people's somewhat narrow notion of morality.

“It is thought sufficient to abstain from gross wickedness, and to be humane and kind to such as happen to come in their way.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 11)

To be sure one must be innocent of blatant sins, yet Butler argues that the moral life demands more.

“Whereas in reality the very constitution of our nature requires that we bring our whole conduct before this superior faculty; wait its determination, enforce upon ourselves its authority, make it the business of our lives, as it is absolutely the whole business of a moral agent, to conform ourselves to it.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 11)

Conscience’s supervision is all-encompassing and our entire being is to be yielded to its oversight. Beyond policing the occasional idiosyncrasies, conscience also seeks to shape a life, a whole person. Butler then surmises,

“This is the true meaning of that ancient precept, Reverence Thyself.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 11)

By submitting to conscience, one accords reverence to the self and in turn finds the true self.

The fourth distinctive feature in Butler’s view of conscience is its intriguing relationship with reason and sense. In one statement, he appears uncertain over conscience’s exact composition and distinction.

“It is manifest great part of common language, and of common behavior over the world, is formed upon supposition of such a moral faculty; whether called conscience, moral reason, moral sense, or Divine reason; whether considered as a *sentiment of understanding*, or as a *perception of the heart*; or, which seems the truth, as including both.” (italics added, Butler, 1900, V2, p. 287)

In this statement, Butler perceives in conscience the working of both sense and reason.

He describes it as a sensibility of the reflective mind and a rationality of the sentimental heart. In the more formal definition, Butler locates conscience at the apex of a tripartite structure, on top of principle-reason and passions-sense.¹⁰ This suggests conscience as

¹⁰ There are various interpretations of how Butler related conscience (C), the principle of self-love and benevolence (R), and several passions and affections (S). While there is no argument that C is at the top, there are alternative views of whether R and S are co-equal, or whether R is above S or

being above and beyond reason and sense. Nevertheless, as discussed previously, Butler often associates conscience with the principle of reflection. Here is another example:

“There is a superior principle of reflection or conscience in every man, which distinguishes between the internal principles of his heart, as well as his external actions.” (Butler, 1900, VI, p. 45)

Throughout Butler’s writing, one sees a close connection between conscience and reason. Hence, I submit that conscience for Butler is not another faculty distinct from reason and sense; rather, conscience is reason.

D) Framework of Moral Knowledge

In Butler’s scheme, the human being is guided by principle, passions, and conscience in moral deliberation. To elaborate on his framework of moral knowledge, I will analyze the process of acquiring moral knowledge in two parts. The first is the “to know” stage, i.e., to attain cognitive awareness of a specific decision. The second is the “to do” dimension, i.e., to act on the acquired knowledge.

D1) To Know

In Butler’s formulation, the process of acquiring moral knowledge involves three sets of key concepts: the general and particular norms, the more determinate and less determinate challenges, and the exceptional cases.

D1.1) General and Particular

vice versa. See R. G. Frey’s essay “Butler on Self Love and Benevolence,” in *Joseph Butler’s Moral and Religious Thought: Tercentenary Essays* (ed. Cunliffe, 1992, pp. 243-268, 269-292).

In the preface to the *Fifteen Sermons*, Butler presents an exposé on the two ways moral subjects can be dealt with:

“One begins from inquiring into the abstract relations of things: the other from a matter of fact, namely, what the particular nature of man is, its several parts, their economy or constitution; from whence it proceeds to determine what course of life it is, which is correspondent to this whole nature.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 4)

The first method that addresses “the abstract relations of things,” I submit, could be broadly understood as deliberation of the general form. This mode of inquiry deals primarily with theoretical conceptual matters. The second approach, which engages the “matter of fact,” I suggest, can be regarded as deliberation of the particular genre. This type of inquiry deals with the application of general principles into contextual exigencies. And the object of study is focused on the more specific and practical aspects of life. Butler then explains that these two forms of inquiry, i.e., general-abstract and particular-factual, present different challenges with varying levels of complexities.

“The first seems the most direct formal proof, and in some respects the least liable to cavil and dispute: the latter is in a peculiar manner adapted to satisfy a fair mind: and is more easily applicable to the several particular relations and circumstances in life.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 4)

The abstract mode, Butler insinuates, is less contentious, with evidence readily discernable. The factual form that applies more immediately to practical living presents a distinctive challenge. Butler seems to imply that it is also the more problematic, suited only for the “fair” minded. In Butler’s framework, I argue, moral deliberation may be divided into two types: the general-abstract and particular-factual. The latter presents more intricate challenges than the former.

D1.2) More Determinate and Less Determinate

The next important feature in Butler's framework is the place of evidence and consequences in decision-making. Butler stated his mission in writing the *Analogy* as essentially to present Christian arguments based on credible evidence.

"I shall now . . . endeavor to give some account of the general argument for the truth of Christianity, consisting both of the direct and circumstantial evidence, considered as making up an argument."(Butler, 1900, V2, p. 239)

The gist of moral reflection is indeed that of evaluating proof in matters of belief and at the practical level to render judgments on the basis of anticipatable end results. Therefore, the challenge at hand is to collate evidence and to assess consequences. And on this task,

Butler issues a note of caution:

"We know not beforehand, what degree or kind of natural information, it were to be expected God would afford men, each by his own reason and experience: nor how far He would enable and effectually dispose them to communicate it, whatever it should be, to each other."(Butler, 1900, V2, p. 166)

There is no guarantee, Butler warns, that people will have access to all the data needed to make informed decisions. He adds,

"Nor whether the evidence of it would be certain, highly probable, or doubtful; nor whether it would be given with equal clearness and conviction to all." (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 166)

Even with all the available information, the decisions reached can be uneven among different people. And the qualities of those decisions vary widely, ranging from clarity to vagueness. Thus, Butler warns,

"Whoever will consider the whole commerce of human life, will see that a great part, perhaps the greatest part, of the intercourse amongst mankind, cannot be reduced to fixed determinate rules." (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 131)

In moral deliberation one cannot proceed with rigid assumptions. Indeed most of life's challenges do not offer straightforward resolutions. Nevertheless, Butler believed

that there are some cases, albeit a smaller number, wherein right or wrong can be ascertained clearly.

“Yet in these cases there is a right and a wrong: a merciful, a liberal, a kind and compassionate behavior, which surely is our duty; and an unmerciful contracted spirit, a hard and oppressive course of behavior, which is most certainly immoral and vicious.”(Butler, 1900, V1, p. 131)

While acknowledging the general ambiguity inherent in the quest for knowledge, Butler also identified some clearly discernable moral precepts.

“It is to be observed then, that as there are express determinate acts of wickedness, such as murder, adultery, theft: on the other hand, there are numberless cases in which the vice and wickedness cannot be exactly defined.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 130)

In light of this double recognition, Butler’s framework of moral challenges, I submit, may be categorized into two types: the more determinate and less determinate.

D1.2.1) More Determinate

While most truths are difficult to grasp, some can be understood readily. In Butler’s opinion, the fundamental tenets of natural religions form one such category of beliefs.

“The general proof of natural religion . . . does, I think, lie level to common men.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 217)

All people have access to the basic evidence supporting natural religion. More specifically, Butler claims, people possess the potential to achieve a fairly determinate confidence in the existence of God.

“Common men, were they as much in earnest about religion, as about their temporal affairs, are capable of being convinced upon real evidence, that there is a God Who governs the world . . . There is no need of abstruse reasoning and distinctions, to convince an unprejudiced understanding, that there is a God Who made and governs the world.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 268)

If diligent and sincere, one could, says Butler, come to the conviction of a creator God who remains concerned and active in the world's affairs. Thus for Butler, if people's natural faculties are utilized properly there are subjects that can be perceived with more determinacy, e.g., God's existence.

D1.2.2) Less Determinate

In a sermon titled "The Ignorance of Man," Butler acknowledged that there is a limit to the human capability to comprehend. While some matters are perceived clearly, many more elude full understanding.

"Every secret which is disclosed, every discovery which is made, every new effect which is brought to view, serves to convince us of numberless more which remain concealed, and which we had before no suspicions of." (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 191)

Human knowledge, Butler reminds us, is never entirely complete and is inevitably constrained. One cannot proceed presumptuously to achieve definitive understanding on perplexing subjects. In an observation on practical living, Butler articulated this constraint.

"[It] is our business and our duty to endeavor, within the bounds of veracity and justice, to contribute to the ease, convenience, and even cheerfulness and diversion of our fellow-creatures, yet, from our short views, it is greatly uncertain, whether this endeavor will in particular instances, produce an overbalance of happiness upon the whole; since so many and distant things must come into the account." (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 294)

It is clear that one ought to act for the good of all; nevertheless, translating these dictums into specific actions is no easy matter. One is confronted with practical exigencies where right or wrong cannot always be discerned with the fullest confidence. In the face of these limitations, Butler, in the *Analogy*, advocates an intriguing formula as a pragmatic

response, i.e., probability. Butler begins by explaining that this contingency is resorted to only because of human finitude.

“Probable evidence, in its very nature, affords but an imperfect kind of information; and is to be considered as relative only to beings of limited capacities. For nothing which is the possible object of knowledge, whether past, present, or future, can be probable to an infinite Intelligence; since it cannot but be discerned absolutely as it is in itself, certainly true, or certainly false . . . But to us, probability is the very guide of life.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 3)

Butler’s appeal to probability in the *Analogy* is a call for realism in matters of belief. To be sure, where possible one’s beliefs should be supported by definitive proof. Yet one cannot always assume the procurement of such certain evidence. On some doctrines, Butler suggested, one has to make do with probable evidence. Some lowering of the standards is inevitable and warranted.¹¹ The afterlife is a case in point. For Butler, this doctrine is to be affirmed, albeit without benefit of absolute certainty. Humans do not have conclusive evidence on the reality of the hereafter. One is able to garner some level of confidence, and the shortfall in knowledge must be made up by hope or faith. There remains room for doubt, yet one can contend that the decision to believe is the best possible solution (see Butler, 1900, V2, p. 13-33). Recognizing the constraints in the human ability to fully grasp the Christian vision, Butler advances an intriguing summation:

“. . . with regard to Christianity, it will be observed; that there is a middle between full satisfaction of the truth of it, and a satisfaction of the contrary. The middle state of mind between these two consists in a serious apprehension, that it may be true, joined with doubt whether it be so.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 273)

¹¹ Butler’s pragmatic response to human finitude is also registered in this interesting quote: “If a man were to walk by twilight, must he not follow his eyes as much as if it were broad day and clear sunshine? Or if he were obliged to take a journey by night, would he not ‘give heed to’ any ‘light shining in the darkness, till the day should break and the day-star arise?’” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 195)

In matters of beliefs as they pertain to Christianity, Butler says that there is a middle ground representing a body of doctrines that cannot be affirmed absolutely nor rejected outright. Therefore, these are upheld with some confidence in their veracity yet not completely free of doubt.

To conclude, I thus argue that Butler recognized two types of moral challenges: the more determinate where full comprehension is possible and the less determinate where some aspects elude full understanding.

D1.3) Ordinary Norms and Exceptional Cases

The final feature in Butler's framework is the acquiescence to exceptional exigencies. In the main, under "normal" circumstances, life is ordered according to some standard norms. Then there are the inevitable "extraordinary" situations that demand out-of-the-norm responses. In an exegesis on human governance, Butler alludes to such an exigency:

"Thus suppose a prince to govern his dominions in the wisest manner possible, by common known laws; and that upon some exigencies he should suspend these laws; and govern, in several instances, in a different manner. If he were not a judge of the wisdom of the ordinary administration, there is no reason to think he would be a judge of the wisdom of the extraordinary." (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 165)

To be sure, the thrust of Butler's argument is a plea for competency in normal conditions so as to better equip oneself for emergencies. The point pertinent to the current discussion is Butler's implied recognition of exceptions, i.e., when rules are suspended to accommodate unexpected developments.

D1.3.1) Regardless of Evidence and Consequences

Butler recognized that one must always be prepared for the unforeseen. And one form of the exceptional that he accommodated is the suspension of the requirements for evidence and consideration of consequences expected in moral deliberation. Beliefs, for the most part, are asserted based on evidence. While some proofs are more credible than others, most are plausible at the least. However, Butler seems to have made an exception on one doctrine.

“The wisest and most knowing cannot comprehend the works of God, the methods and designs of His providence in the creation and government of the world. Creation is absolutely and entirely out of our depth, and beyond the extent of our utmost reach.” (Butler, 1900, VI, p. 193)

God’s providential works, in particular those concerned with specifics of the creation stories, Butler admits, are beyond the human capability to verify.

“And yet it is as certain that God made the world, as it is certain that effects must have a cause.” (Butler, 1900, VI, p. 193)

The lack of proof notwithstanding, the creation account remains trustworthy.¹² For Butler, the creation doctrine is affirmed based on faith, regardless of evidence. The “regardless of evidence” exception is also made in the practical realm. In the *Analogy*, in a chapter entitled “The Government of God by Rewards and Punishment,” Butler argued that in decision-making one ought to take into account the consequences of one’s choices. His plea is essentially pastoral, to reassure the righteous of the just rewards awaiting them and warn the wicked of their due punishment. While Butler’s appeal is to give consequences their due consideration, his other statements indicate some exceptions. In one exposition, he argues that there are some decisions to be acted upon regardless of

¹² For Butler, such a doctrine remains true until proven otherwise. The onus is on the skeptics to present persuasive evidence why these beliefs should be discredited.

consequences. He begins by explaining that in most cases decisions are made based on the discernable end results:

“Intention of such and such consequences, indeed, is always included; for it is part of the action itself.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 288)

Butler then suggests that there are cases when some actions ought to be taken regardless of the potential consequences:

“. . . but though the intended good or bad consequences do not follow, we have exactly the same sense of the action as if they did.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 288)

There are times when, even if the desired outcome does not follow, one has the same duty to act. And conscience, Butler declares, is the judge of these actions.

“An action is approved or disapproved apart from the consequences that follow from the action, since the action itself is the only object of the conscience.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 288)

For Butler there are actions that need to be taken in spite of the outcome. In the *Sermons*, he elucidated the existence of such acts from another perspective. While in the main one’s life is ordered in accord with the divine scheme of reward and punishment, Butler suggests that there are exceptions.

“. . . and when we are commanded to ‘love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our mind, and with all our soul’, somewhat more must be meant than merely that we live in hope of rewards or fear of punishment from Him; somewhat more than this must be intended . . .” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 21)

Moral living should be motivated by something more than just hope of rewards or fear of punishment. The genuine love for God, Butler implies, entails a dutiful life lived without such fears or desires, i.e., regardless of consequences.

D1.3.2) Duty and God’s Will

The call to act regardless of consequences is an imperative that demands considerable self-sacrifice. Mindful of the obstacles a person can face in fulfilling such duties, Butler sought to provide pastoral reassurances. He did so by urging reliance, even resignation, to God's will.

“Now there is an excellent foundation of a reasonable and religious resignation . . . Nature teaches and inclines us to take up with our lot: the consideration, that the course of things is unalterable, hath a tendency to quiet the mind under it, to beget a submission of temper to it. But when we can add, that this unalterable course is appointed and continued by infinite wisdom and goodness; how absolute should be our submission, how entire our trust and dependence.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 181)

There are times when fate seems to lead one down a particular life path contrary to one's desire. In these situations, Butler suggests, one is to trust that it is divine appointment at work and submit to its higher guidance.

In sum, Butler recognizes that in moral deliberation there are cases that elude full comprehension. At times, one makes decisions based on less determinate grounds, i.e., probable evidence and consequences. And in some exceptional cases, one acts regardless of proof and foreseeable outcomes.

D2) To Do

The quest for knowledge begins with cognitive discernment. Once a decision is reached, the next step is to act upon that knowledge. In a dissertation entitled “Of the Nature of Virtue,” in which he comments on human innate faculties, Butler spoke of the importance of this second move:

“It ought to be observed, that the object of this faculty is actions, comprehending under that name active or practical principles: those principles from which men would act, if occasions and circumstances gave them power; and which, when fixed and habitual in any person, we call his character.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 287-8)

These actions are the application of principles acquired, and when they become habitual they form one's personality. A person's moral character is defined ultimately by his or her actions. For this reason, Butler is anxious that people's practical conducts measure up to their espoused aspirations. And to that end, I submit, he is concerned with people's actions in two ways: external failures and internal neglects. External failures are the more blatant and they are committed in two ways: omission or commission. In the former, one simply neglects to perform the correct act.

“For the mere neglect of doing what we ought to do would, in many cases, be determined by all men to be in the highest degree vicious.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 290)

Knowing what is right yet failing to act on that knowledge, in Butler's assessment, constitutes a most serious wrong. Moreover, doing what one knows is erroneous is equally incorrect.

“And it is the same also with respect to positive vices, or such as consist in doing what we ought not.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 290)

Thus at the external level, Butler was concerned with the omission of rightful acts and the commission of erroneous deeds. Beyond the external, he also worried about the more subtle internal wrongs, i.e., when a person acts with the improper spirit. This concern is registered in one of his homilies on religious practices.

“All this indeed may be called form; as everything external in religion may be merely so. And therefore whilst we endeavor, in these and other like instances, to keep up the ‘form of godliness’ . . . [we] must endeavor also that this form be made more and more subservient to promote the ‘power’ of it.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 297)

In the first instance the call is to ensure that forms are empowered by spirit. Butler then sharpens the call to an examination of the heart:

“Admonish them to take heed that they mean what they say in their prayers, that their thoughts and intentions go along with their words that they really in their hearts exert and exercise before God the affections they express with their mouth.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 297)

It is one of Butler’s chief concerns that words in the first instance be matched with actions, and these acts in turn must be supported by genuine motivation. Indeed, one of Butler’s sermons was devoted wholly to the dangers of self-deceit (in section F, I will discuss further Butler’s diagnosis of self-deception). To conclude, moral knowledge for Butler ought to be followed by actions and the acts must conform to certain external norms and their internal spirit should be driven by proper motivation.

E) Moral Objectivity and Diversity

Section D dealt with Butler’s acknowledgment of more and less determinate challenges. On the latter, decisions are made based on inconclusive evidence and consequences, and in these cases people inevitably reach ambivalent and often conflicting judgments. For Butler, the Trinitarian doctrine is an example. After commenting on God the Father’s providential rule, the Son Jesus Christ’s mediating role, and the Holy Ghost’s continuing presence, Butler offers these remarks:

“Now little, surely, need be said to show, that this system, or scheme of things, is but imperfectly comprehended by us . . . The Scripture expressly asserts it to be so. And indeed one cannot read a passage relating to this ‘great mystery of godliness’, but what immediately runs up into something which shews us our ignorance on it.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 179)

The Trinity, in Butler’s view, is the prime example where human comprehension reaches its limits. People’s understandings of the mystery surrounding the Godhead are ambiguous and opinions are inevitably at variance. The Trinitarian controversy, as it was referred to in the 18th century, caused serious schisms within the Anglican ranks and also

inflicted political casualties in Parliament. Butler, however, refused to be drawn into the dispute and did not declare a position vis-à-vis the competing views.¹³ His restraint and silence may be read as a reflection of his operating principle on the less determinate cases, i.e., diverse opinions on such subjects are to be tolerated. Butler's stance comported with an emerging English outlook, one that showed greater accommodation for divergent viewpoints. The reality of less determinate challenges and the toleration of the resultant diverse points of views, however, raised serious questions concerning objectivity. Do these subjects and divergent judgments inevitably lead to relativism? Is there an impartial standard by which to evaluate human opinions and conduct?

E1) Objective Order

To begin, I argue that Butler's framework presupposes an objective order. Section A presented Butler's description of nature as a system, with a constitution put in place by God to govern creation. This vision assumes a pre-existing order guiding human conduct. In the following, Butler provides additional insight on this natural order, this time in its relation to human nature and behavior:

“The nature of man is adapted to some course of action or other. Upon comparing some actions with this nature, they appear suitable and correspondent to it: from comparison of other actions with the same nature, there arises to our view some unsuitableness or disproportion . . . The correspondence of actions to the nature of the agent renders them natural: their disproportion to it, unnatural.”
(Butler, 1900, VI, p. 57)

In this exegesis, humans are said to be conferred with a nature in which is embedded standards to appraise whether human conduct is natural or otherwise. This invocation of

¹³ The Trinitarian Controversy involves various parties (see Penelhum, 1985, pp. 115). The doctrine of the trinity is normative for Christianity and for Butler, but its particular formulation is secondary. This means that no one version of it is determinate for Butler and differences can be tolerated.

nature as the measure of actions, I submit, suggests Butler's assumption of a preexisting fixed natural benchmark upon which human life is regulated. In a separate exposition on the Creator, Butler provides further explanations on this order. God, he begins, did not create humankind only to leave it to the mercies of some arbitrary forces.

“. . . man cannot be considered as a creature left by his Maker to act at random, and live at large up to the extent of his natural power, as passions, humor, willfulness, happen to carry him; which is the condition brute creatures are in.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 53)

Instead, God has installed in the human person a constitution upon which one's life is to be conducted.

“But that from his make, constitution, or nature, he is in the strictest and most proper sense a law to himself. He hath the rule of right within: what is wanting is only that he honestly attend to it.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 53)

Humans, Butler says, have a set of laws implanted in them. Failure to comply with these rules, he warns, would result in serious consequences.

“The observation, that man is thus by his very nature a law to himself, pursued to the just consequences, is of the utmost importance; because from it it will follow, that though men should, through stupidity or speculative skepticism, be ignorant of, or disbelieve, any authority in the universe to punish the violation of this law; yet, if there should be such authority, they would be as really liable to punishment, as though they had been beforehand convinced, that such punishment would follow.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 53)

These two passages indicate that in Butler's view there is a natural source of moral knowledge and God has established a law in nature as an objective reference to evaluate human conduct.

E2) Primary and Secondary Orders

While a unified order is affirmed, Butler admits that the human grasp of the divine design remains partial. The interpretation of God's scheme is incomplete, e.g., with regard to the Trinitarian controversy. This reality, where aspects of nature elude

human comprehension and leave people languishing in intractable discord, presents a major dilemma to the thesis of unity. If truth is ultimately singular, how then to reconcile it with the pluralistic reality? Butler's strategy, I argue, is to divide the order into two subsets, primary and secondary. The former represents features of the order that are discerned clearly, i.e., more determinate cases, and the latter represents those subjects beset with ambiguities, i.e., less determinate cases.

E2.1) Primary Order

The primary order represents beliefs and values of the more determine genre. These are treated as being core, i.e., knowledge that forms a moral tradition's foundation. These primary norms are then maintained firmly, i.e., noncompliance is considered a serious violation and would incur strict censure. The existence of God, for example, is one belief Butler assumes all should possess with a clear perception, and he treats it as a fundamental doctrine underpinning the human moral order. He allows no compromise on this core credo. Any diminishment of the divine Author, for Butler, is tantamount to heresy and deserves the strongest condemnation. Historically, Hobbes was Butler's atheistic nemesis. Butler's refutation of Hobbes's melancholy worldview is resolute; to dismiss God, even implicitly, is sufficient cause for denouncement. Here is one example of Butler's harsh rebuke:

“It is therefore wonderful, those people who seem to think there is but one evil in life, that of superstition, should not see that atheism and profaneness must be the introduction of it. So that in every view of things, and upon all accounts, irreligion is at present our chief danger.” (Butler, 1900, VI, p. 214)

E2.2) Secondary Order

The secondary order represents beliefs and values of the less determinate type. These are treated as supplemental, i.e., as knowledge that supports and illuminates the core doctrines. These secondary norms are then maintained with tentativeness, i.e., strict conformity is not expected and people are allowed to hold divergent views on these norms. For Butler, the afterlife is one doctrine where people's understanding is stained with ambiguity. While important, he regards it as an addendum to explain God's divine scheme and accommodates divergent views on it. Indeed, he urges reticence when deliberating on these matters:

“When we speak of things so much above our comprehension, as the employment and happiness of a future state, doubtless it behooves to speak with all modesty and distrust of ourselves.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 188)

Historically, the Deists were the main skeptics on the question of the existence of life after death. To be sure Butler is critical of them, yet his reaction is decidedly less severe compared with his condemnation of Hobbes. On these secondary norms, he showed tolerance for different views, conceding that people may sincerely disagree on these subjects.

E3) Maintaining Objectivity in Diversity

The two-tiered primary and secondary framework, I argue, is Butler's strategy to reconcile unity and plurality. Ideally, all opinions would be formulated determinately and all judgments rendered objectively. In the real world, this is not to be. Not every viewpoint can be definitively made and not all judgments impartially delivered. Hence, Butler, I argue, limited the objective expectations to the primary order. Beyond the primary, he conceded, lie issues and concerns that elude objective understanding and inevitably suffer from partiality. These he consigned to the secondary order, in which he

allowed subjective differences of opinions. “Primary” and “secondary,” to be sure, are not Butler’s own terms. Yet I argue that they are implicit in his framework and will present evidence of these implied categories in Section E4. I intend first to address an issue arising from Butler’s two-tiered order. Does tolerating erroneous views, even of the secondary order, compromise the objective vision? Butler’s toleration of divergent opinions, I submit, is a concession to subjectivism. However, I argue that this is not extreme relativism, as Butler’s enforcement of the primary norms checks against any excessive subjectivism.

E3.1) Liberty and Order

I begin with a survey of Butler’s views on the 18th century English experience with liberty. During Butler’s time, England embarked on an experiment with Lockean civil society, where the state seeks to protect a wider public space for the citizenry’s freer practice of their private beliefs. In a sermon delivered in the House of Lords, Bishop Butler praised this political initiative and at the same time inserted a note on its ecclesiastical significance.

“Liberty, which is the very genius of our civil constitution, and runs through every branch of it, extends its influence to the ecclesiastical part of it.” (Butler, 1900, VI, p. 262)

Butler was concerned that the church should emulate the state’s promotion of liberty. He warned,

“A religious establishment without a toleration of such as think they cannot in conscience conform to it, is itself a general tyranny; because it claims absolute authority over conscience; and would soon beget particular kinds of tyranny of the worst sort, tyranny over the mind, and various superstitions; after the way should be paved for them, as it soon must, by ignorance.” (Butler, 1900, VI, p. 262)

The antidote to tyranny, according to Butler, is for the authorities, civil and religious alike, to recognize conscience as the individual person's guide, i.e., they should work to protect people's freedom of conscience. Butler then extends the plea for tolerance to the personal level, exhorting the private individual to guard against imposing one's views on others.

“Let us transfer, each of us, the equity of this civil constitution to our whole personal character; and be sure to be as much afraid of subjection to mere arbitrary will and pleasure in ourselves, as to the arbitrary will of others. For the tyranny of our own lawless passions is the nearest and most dangerous of all tyrannies.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 267)

It is clear that Butler holds liberty in the highest esteem. He sees the advancement of freedom as the best prevention against tyranny, by the state, the church, and even by individuals towards each other. He thus concludes,

“Let us then value our civil constitution, not because it leaves us the power of acting as mere humor and passion carries us, in those respects, in which governments less free lay men under restraints; but for its equal laws, by which the great are disabled from oppressing those below them.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 267)

While freedom's value is unquestioned, Butler was not oblivious to its potential abuses and dangers.

“Liberty is particularly liable to become excessive, and to degenerate insensibly into licentiousness.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 239)

Unbridled liberty can lead to great harm. Freedom, in Butler's view, needs to be properly understood and for an authorized opinion he again deferred to St. Paul:

“The apostle adds, ‘but as the servants of God’: *as free – but as His servants*, Who requires dutiful submission to ‘every ordinance of man,’ to magistracy; and to whom we are accountable for our manner of using the liberty we enjoy under it; as well as for all other parts of our behavior. ‘Not using your liberty as a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.’” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 231)

As free agents, we nevertheless remain God's servants; therefore, liberty comes with accountability. Butler then shifts the discussion to the guardians of the establishment, first reminding them of their duty to confer moral oversight (vis-à-vis freedom).

“Now a reasonable establishment provides instructions for the ignorant, withdraws them, not in the way of force, but of guidance, from running after those kinds of conceits.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 262)

He follows with more a specific assertion regarding the civil authority's role in religious affairs:

“On the other hand, a constitution of civil government without any religious establishment is a chimerical project, of which there is no example: and which, leaving the generality without guide and instruction, must leave religion to be sunk and forgotten amongst them; and at the same time give full scope to superstitions, and the gloom of enthusiasm; which last, especially, ought surely to be diverted and checked, as far as it can be done without force.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 262)

The subtext to Butler's concern is that even as freedom is advanced there are core ideals that cannot be compromised. And the state and church share the responsibility to preserve these foundational values. In sum, for Butler, liberty and order are equally important. They are intertwined; attention to one demands a corresponding consideration of the other.

“And the love of liberty, when it is indeed the love of liberty, which carries us to withstand tyranny, will as much carry us to reverence authority, and support it; for this most obvious reason, that one is as necessary to the very being of liberty, as the other is destructive of it.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 239)

E3.2) Objectivity and Diversity

The discussion on liberty and order is germane to and provides the context for addressing the issue raised earlier: does toleration of diverse opinions undermine the objective norms? In the dialectics, Butler was concerned with promoting liberty as a check against authority turning into tyranny. At the same time, he was mindful that

unrestrained freedom can foment chaos, thus a measured order is warranted. It is this second concern that relates to the toleration debate: does freedom of expression lead to the disorders of extreme relativism?

Freedom, by definition, is the honoring of people's rights to divergent private views. Butler, I showed, allowed such autonomy in the secondary norms, e.g., the doctrine of the Trinity. And this allowance is informed and guided by two interconnected assumptions. The first is that toleration is granted because these subjects elude full human comprehension. The second is the tacit admission that there is no objective standard to evaluate these partially understood matters. Hence, people are free to advance divergent views, and a degree of subjectivism is conceded on these secondary norms. Nevertheless, this is not extreme relativism. The freedom to assert one's subjective views has limits. It is restricted to the secondary order, with the primary norms setting the outer boundaries. For example, Butler tolerated contentious views on the Trinity (a secondary norm) but allowed no compromise on belief in God (a primary norm). People are free to espouse various views on the secondary matters but opinions that violate the primary norms are not permitted. Thus, people's freedoms are not without constraints. In sum, Butler did exhibit toleration yet his inclusiveness did not undermine the objective order because the primary norms provide the fixed boundary that checks against extreme relativism.

E4) Basis for Primary and Secondary Orders

Butler's strategy to reconcile unity with vexing plurality is to organize reality into two orders: primary and secondary. These are not his explicit terms; nevertheless, I submit that they are implicit categories in his framework. I will present two sets of textual analysis to show that they are implied in Butler's outlook.

E4.1) Differentiated Responses

In the main, people are regarded as being self-reliant, yet at times external supervision is warranted. As a bishop, Butler was mindful of the church's responsibility to provide parishioners with pastoral oversight. In discharging this duty, Butler laid down an important rule, people ought to be judged according to their particular locations.

“If we would keep in mind, that every merciful allowance shall be made, and no more be required of any one, than what might have been equitably expected of him, from the circumstances in which he was placed; and not what might have been expected had he been placed in other circumstances.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 207).

The thrust of this plea is to attend fairly to people's contextual particularities and set demands that reflect people's specific situations. This, Butler adds, is consonant with scriptural instruction.

“. . . in Scripture's language, that every man shall be 'accepted according to what he had, not according to what he had not.'" (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 207).

People's views are to be received or dismissed based on just expectations. Butler's pastoral appeal underscores two important principles. The first is the acknowledgment of people's variable statuses, i.e., individuals stand at different points along the moral development scale. The second is Butler's subsequent recommendation: people's diverse statuses mean that they are subject to different norms, i.e., values that reflect their locations. This latter point is instructive as it indicates Butler's recognition of a range of moral standards. The introduction of primary and secondary orders, I suggest, is one expression of these different norms.

E4.2) Religion: Natural and Revealed

One subject wherein the primary and secondary categorization is implicitly noted is Butler's description of religion, which he differentiated into natural and revealed.

E4.2.I) Revealed Religion as Supplement

To begin, Butler broadly defined religion as the publication of God's oracles for humankind.

“The general doctrine of religion, that all things are under the direction of one righteous Governor, having been established by repeated revelations in the first ages of the world, was left with the bulk of mankind, to be honestly preserved pure and entire, or carelessly forgotten, or willfully corrupted.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 203)

Religion takes the sacred messenger role of conveying the divine commands intended for human compliance. Butler then introduces Christianity to shed light on the various aspects of religion.

“But the importance of Christianity will more distinctly appear, by considering it more distinctly: first as a republication, and external institution, of nature or essential Religion, adapted to the present circumstances of mankind, and intended to promote natural piety and virtue.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 140)¹⁴

Initially, there is natural religion. Christianity is then revealed as a representation of natural religion. And both, Butler says, serve the same goal, i.e., to advance a pious and virtuous life. To this elaboration, Butler adds another piece of Christian distinctiveness:

“And secondly, as containing an account of a dispensation of things not discoverable by reason, in consequences of which, several distinct precepts are enjoined us.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 140)

Christianity communicates special revelation, which is knowledge not accessible by reason. Herein lies the key distinction; revealed religion is not only a republication but also a supplement to natural religion. Natural religion is God's communiqué revealed through reason. The fact that there are divine decrees beyond reason suggests that natural

religion does not encompass all of God's commands. Therefore, in communicating precepts not known in natural religion, Christianity supplements it and completes God's revelation to humankind.

E4.2.2) Natural Religion as Foundation

Butler also framed natural and revealed religion in another relationship, this time placing one's authority over the other. In the following statement, he uses an intriguing choice of words to describe the association:

“For though natural religion is the foundation and principal part of Christianity, it is not in any sense the whole of it.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 140)

The main point here is the already discussed status of natural religion as not containing the whole of God's revelation. However, Butler's usage of the term “foundation” is highly instructive. Natural religion is admittedly only a part; nevertheless, in Butler's view it is the “principal” part. This is an important point; it means that natural religion does not take an inferior position vis-à-vis Christianity. Rather, it is Christianity's underpinning and is fundamental to understanding God's overall scheme. In an exegesis on the collision of the precepts of natural and revealed religion, Butler again stressed the importance of the former vis-à-vis the latter.

“Now this being premised, suppose two standing precepts enjoined by the same authority; that, in certain conjunctures, it is impossible to obey both; that the former is moral, i.e., a precept of which we see the reasons, and that they hold in the particular case before us; but that the latter is positive, i.e., a precept of which we do not see the reason; it is indisputable that our obligations are to obey the former; because there is an apparent reason for this preference, and none against it.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 151)

These “reason” and “non-reason” precepts may be interpreted broadly as the dictates of natural and revealed religion, respectively. When they do collide, Butler says that the

¹⁴ Butler's usage of the term natural piety and virtue is commonly understood as the general

former takes precedence over the latter. Natural religion's higher status is presented more plainly in the following:

“ . . . if in revelation there be found any passages, the seeming meaning of which is contrary to natural religion; we may most certainly conclude such seeming meaning not to be the real one.” (Butler, in Gladstone's edition, VI, p. 172).

It is clear that Butler placed natural and revealed religion in a hierarchical order, with the former being foundational and its precepts having authoritative preference over the latter. This categorization of religion into natural and revealed with corresponding levels of authority, I suggest, implicitly assumes primary and secondary orders, with natural religion considered as primary and revealed religion as secondary.

E4.2.3) Constituents and Standards

Another feature that distinguishes natural and revealed religion is their constituents. Without exception all people by virtue of reason, according to Butler, are recipients of the divine decrees manifested in natural religions. Revealed religion's content, however, is exclusive; its special revelation is made known only to some.

“ . . . a dispensation of Providence, which is a scheme or system of things; carried on by the mediation of a divine person, the Messiah, in order to the recovery of the world, yet not revealed to all men, nor proved with the strongest possible evidence to all those to whom it is revealed; but only to such a part of mankind, and with such particular evidence, as the wisdom of God thought.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 9)

This additional knowledge is not presented clearly nor is it universally available.

Scripture, Butler then explains, is the marker dividing humanity into those who are in the dark and those who possess the light of God's special revelation.

“If the fact of the case really were, that some have received no light at all from the Scripture; as many ages and countries in the heathen world.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 206)

moral principles applicable to all, i.e., be truthful, be compassionate, etc.

God, with discretion, has revealed to all a selection of the divine intent through natural religion but has chosen to reveal to only some the special designs in revealed religion. This disparate dispensation has implications. As discussed in section E4.1, people are responsible for what they are deemed to know. In terms of the current discussion, people are accountable for what is revealed to them, i.e., whether they are recipients of natural or special revelations. This principle, I will show, informs Butler's reaction to the world's diverse religious traditions.

Christianity, to be sure, is not special revelation's sole custodian. The revealed religions, known also as the "Book Religions," include Judaism and Islam. The Scripture, broadly defined, is the commonly recognized authority amongst these groups. To the extent that these traditions can be criticized, they are charged with falling short of scriptural expectations.¹⁵ In the following, we see an expression of Butler's reservations towards Muslims.

" . . . that others, though they have, by means of it, had essential or natural religion enforced upon their consciences, yet have never had the genuine Scripture-revelation, with its real evidence, proposed to their consideration; and the ancient Persians and modern Mahometans may possibly be instance of people in a situation somewhat like to this." (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 206)

The Muslims (and early Persians), in Butler's opinion, failed to maintain an unadulterated understanding of Scripture. And for this reason they are to be faulted. A different standard applies for religions without the Book. On this, Butler's address to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel provides some intriguing insight. Not unexpectedly, he echoed the call to disseminate the gospel, but what is significant is Butler's reason. The

¹⁵ Butler does have some harsh words against Catholicism and Judaism (see Butler, 1900, V2, pp. 263, 265).

need for Christianity arises, Butler said, because natural religion has failed to flourish in these distant lands.

“But if our colonies abroad are left without public religion, [what] can be expected, but that, from living in a continued forgetfulness of God, they will at length cease to believe in Him; and so sink into stupid atheism?” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 213)

Public religion, synonymous with natural religion, is almost lost in the new world, i.e., the West Indies and America, and in Butler’s view, Christianity is necessary to salvage the desperate situation. Butler’s missionary concern also had an implicit reference to the Eastern world.

“Natural religion became gradually more and more darkened with superstition, little understood, less regarded in practice; and the face of it scarce discernable to all, in the religious establishments of the most learned, polite nations.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 204)

For these faraway civilizations, the criteria that Butler applies are those of natural and not revealed religion. Only when they fail to measure up to nature’s universal standards does Butler suggest the introduction of the Gospel.

E4.2.4) Religious Pluralism: Inclusive and Exclusive

Butler’s view of the world’s religions warrants another observation. God, in Butler’s vision, has set for nature a telos. In light of humankind’s pluralistic religious expressions, would Butler regard them as striving at and contributing to the same goal? His view, I submit, is both inclusive and exclusive, accepting some diverse religious expressions as constructive while dismissing others as detrimental. For Butler, natural religion, though incomplete, is foundational. While not perfect, i.e., partial in its comprehension of God’s plans, these traditions are essential and, I add, also sufficient in advancing God’s telos. On this account, Butler is inclusive, recognizing and accepting the

roles of diverse traditions other than Christianity in furthering the divine scheme. Butler's view, I submit, is also exclusive in some ways. Not all human traditions are compatible with the divine telos. For example, he regarded Hobbes and the auxiliary atheistic groups as failing to meet the basic qualifications of a viable moral tradition and he censured and rejected them accordingly. In sum, within certain criteria, Butler did include traditions other than Christianity as fellow moral pilgrims. He also excluded those that fail to comply with some minimal requirements.

F) Moral Frailty

Each person is designed with the capability to discern right and wrong. However, humankind remains fallible and does err in moral perception. The reality of human failing underscores the need for moral oversight. In Butler's scheme, supervision emanates first from the self; when a wrong is committed, conscience steps in to convict the offender and avert future mistakes. If conscientious, the person would overcome his or her lapses and grow in maturity. Alas, conscience's strength is not inexhaustible; its effort to correct and prevent wrongs may yet be resisted. Conscience's ability to enforce its dictates, Butler admits, is not total.¹⁶

“Had it strength, as it has right; had it power, as it has manifest authority, it would absolutely govern the world.” (Butler, 1990, V1, p. 48)

Conscience's limitation is the moral self's Achilles heel and, in Butler's diagnosis, the cause of the tepidity that had befallen the English moral condition. Self-partiality and

¹⁶ The doctrine of conscience as *the* authority has stirred disagreement among modern scholars. Elizabeth Anscombe advanced this charge: “Butler exalts conscience, but appears ignorant that a man's conscience may tell him to do the vilest things” (quoted by Brian Hebblethwaite in *Butler on Conscience and Virtue* [see Cunliffe, ed., 1999]). Hebblethwaite proceeded to critique Anscombe's misinterpretation of Butler's view, arguing that Butler is not as naïve as Anscombe

apathy, Butler lamented, permeated the spirit of the times and afflicted society across the board.

“It is to be observed amongst persons of the lowest rank, in proportion to their compass of thought, as much as amongst men of education and improvement.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 14)

In one diagnosis of the moral condition, Butler distinguished human failings into two types. The first may be described broadly as of the “weak” form:

“Some appear to be blinded and deceived by inordinate passion, in their worldly concerns, as much as in Religion. Others are, not deceived, but, as it were, forcibly carried away by the like passions, against their better judgment, and feeble resolutions too of acting better.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 72)

In this weakened condition, people continue to wrestle with their mistakes and retain awareness of the transgressions committed. However, there are also failures of a more serious magnitude:

“And there are men, truly they are not few, who shamelessly avow, not their interest, but their mere will and pleasure, to be their law of life: and who, in open defiance of everything that is reasonable, will go on in a course of vicious extravagance, foreseeing, with no remorse and little fear, that it will be their temporal ruin; and some of them, under the apprehension of the consequences of wickedness in another state.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 72)

Among these people, the basic sense of right and wrong is becoming undone. Thus, I submit that in Butler’s analysis there are two types of people who suffer moral failing: those who experience lapses and fall into a morally weakened state and those who suffer a more severe moral deformation.

F1) Conscience Weakened

When wrongs are committed, it is not uncommon, Butler says, for people to try to justify or excuse their wrongdoing:

depicted and was in fact acutely mindful of human fallibility, as his sermons on self-deceit showed.

“There are doubtless many instances of the ambitious, the revengeful, the covetous, and those whom with too great indulgence we only call the men of pleasure, who will not allow themselves to think how guilty they are, who explain and argue away their guilt to themselves:” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 132)

This effort, Butler claims, largely fails.

“. . . and though they do really impose upon themselves in some measure yet there are none of them but have, if not a proper knowledge, yet at least an implicit suspicion, where the weakness lies, and what part of their behavior they have reason to wish unknown or forgotten for ever.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 132)

A person can be haunted by his or her wrongdoing. Indeed, people may continue to seek a way out of their guilt:

“Yet, notwithstanding this, there *frequently appears* a suspicion, that all is not right, or as it should be: and perhaps there *is always* at bottom somewhat of this sort.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 132)

In Butler’s view, there is no easy escape from the inner prodding of one’s moral sense. In these instances, the person is perceived as suffering moral lapses, i.e., a momentary failure, yet retains an awareness of right or wrong. Their conscience is weakened partially. Its ability to avert error is compromised but it maintains its ability to convict a person of his or her wrongs, i.e., to torment the soul. In this state of moral weakness, the person languishes in a condition akin to that of St. Paul in his famous lamentation:

“For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me” (Romans 7:20).

F2) Conscience Asleep

In the weakened state, Butler asserts, people retain a sense of right and wrong.

They continue to experience an inner struggle, unless they choose to deceive themselves.

“But as very ill men may have a real and strong sense of virtue and religion, in proportion as this is the case with any, they cannot be easy within themselves but deluding their conscience.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 234)

Indeed, this restlessness, Butler explains, is conscience beckoning the self to heed its dictates. Alas, conscience's prodding can be defied.

“But this sometimes they carelessly neglect to do, and sometimes carefully avoid doing.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 234)

When this rebellion persists over a long time, the person's moral compass may become perverted.

“And as ‘the integrity of the upright guides him,’ guides even a man's judgment; so wickedness may distort it to such a degree, as that he may ‘call evil good, and good evil; put darkness for light, and light for darkness.’” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 234)

Thus a weakened conscience, if left unchecked, can deteriorate and its residual judicial capability jeopardized. In another passage, Butler describes how deceptions can result in a slumbering conscience.

“Therefore if there be any such thing in mankind as putting half-deceits upon themselves; which there plainly is, either by avoiding reflection, or (if they do reflect) by religious equivocation, subterfuges, and palliating matters to themselves; by these means *conscience may be laid asleep*, and they may go on in a course of wickedness with less disturbance.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 98)

Indeed, neglect and deceit would bring about a moral slumber. According to Butler, Balaam is a biblical example of one who consciously goes against his better judgment.

“So that the state of Balaam's mind was this: he wanted to do what he knew to be very wicked, and contrary to the express command of God; he had inward checks and restraints, which he could entirely get over; he therefore casts about for ways to reconcile this wickedness with his duty. How great a paradox so ever this may appear, as it is indeed a contradiction in terms, it is the very account which the Scripture gives us of him.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 95)

F3) The Lost Self?

For Butler, the human person can succumb to two forms of failure. The first occurs when one errs yet retains a residue of moral awareness. In the second, the person surrenders to deception and allows his or her inner moral beacon to become dimmed.

Both conditions are lamentable, yet there is no question, Butler says, which is the greater evil.

“And if people will be wicked, they had better of the two be so from the common vicious passions without such refinements, than from this deep and calm source of delusion; which undermines the whole principle of good; darkens that light, that ‘candle of the Lord’ within, which is to direct our steps; and corrupts conscience, which is the guide of life.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 136)

Human vulnerability to vice raises the question of whether a person’s moral capability may be lost forever. Can a slumbering conscience be reawakened? Butler seems to indicate that the human innate moral form is never entirely destroyed, even in a dysfunctional self.

“The body may be impaired in sickness, a tree may decay, a machine may be out of order, and yet the system and constitution of them not totally dissolved. There is plainly something which answers to all this in the moral constitution of man.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 52n)

In another exposé, Butler claims that even in people who have strayed into a depraved existence, there remains an inner yearning to be in the light.

“How much so ever men differ in the course of life they prefer, and in their ways of palliating and excusing their vices to themselves; yet all agree in the one thing, desiring to ‘die the death of the righteous.’ This is surely remarkable.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 101)

For Butler humankind is surely prone to vice, yet there is also an inextinguishable good in the human makeup, no matter how feeble that impulse may be at times. In other words, conscience may indeed fall asleep but it awaits its moment of reawakening.

G) Moral Cultivation

In Butler’s vision humankind is designed with an innate capability to play a vital role in the divine telos. However, as a bud requires diligent cultivation to bring it to full

bloom, in like manner human nature demands careful nurturing. In one passage, Butler expresses this point plainly:

“. . . mankind is left, by Nature, an unformed, unfinished creature, utterly deficient and unqualified, before the acquirement of knowledge, experience, and habits for the mature state of life.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 83)

For all its ability, the moral self, Butler reminds us, remains raw in its potential and much work lies ahead before this is brought to full fruition. This effort is usually framed as self-cultivation. Indeed, the initiative starts with the individual tending to his or her own personal growth. Yet as discussed previously, people do err, i.e., resist conscience, inflicting serious impediments to moral development. The reality of personal neglect shifts the focus of cultivation to another source, i.e., external supervision. The moral self, while autonomous, is not entirely self-sufficient. A person’s growth is as much a private effort as it is a public endeavor. To that end, Bishop Butler is mindful of the state and church’s duty to be engaged in its citizens’ and parishioners’ moral well-being.

G1) Balanced Emphasis

A recurring theme in Butler’s work and outlook is to plead for moderation and warn against excesses:

“Everybody knows, you therefore need only just be put in mind, that there is such a thing, as having so great horror of one extreme, as to run insensibly and of course into the contrary.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 169)

Here Butler addresses what he perceives as a flawed, uneven approach to moral cultivation. Some teachings, he bemoans, have been used as a cover to promote excessive sensuality.

“. . . and that a doctrine’s having been a shelter for enthusiasm, or made to serve the purposes of superstition.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 169)

Then Butler adds that the opposite wrong is also committed:

“. . . or how manifestly we are got into the contrary extreme, under the notion of a reasonable religion; so very reasonable, as to have nothing to do with the heart and affections.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 169)

In Butler’s view, to overemphasize reason or sense to the neglect of the other is to adopt an imbalanced cultivation method. The proper approach must nurture equally the heart’s moral sensibility and the mind’s critical reasoning.

G2) Study and Spiritual Programs

Butler’s strategy for moral cultivation is to strive for rounded development with a balanced approach. With a focus set on rigorous thinking and strong moral sensibility, his project, I submit, may be conceived as consisting of two main programs: study and spiritual.

The study program aims to strengthen one’s intellectual capability. For Butler, the Scripture is at the center of this effort.

“Therefore the Scripture, not being a book of theory and speculation, but a plain rule of life for mankind, has with the utmost possible propriety put the principle of virtue upon the love of our neighbor.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 155)

The task is to strive for sound biblical understanding. Butler’s contribution to this endeavor takes two forms, the written word and the preached word. The *Analogy* represents the former genre. As an intellectual apology for Christianity, Butler’s work follows in the footsteps of a long-standing and revered Christian scholarly tradition of scribes and theologians committed to doctrinal deliberation. The *Fifteen Sermons*, a compilation of Butler’s Rolls Chapel homilies, embodies another venerated practice: the pulpit ministry, where the word is preached to quicken the laity’s hearts and minds.

The spiritual program's goal is to enhance people's moral sensibility and to cultivate astute sentiment. This broadly entails religious practices ranging from private prayers to elaborate public rituals. Regarding these spiritual exercises, there are two noteworthy points. The first is Butler's call for renewed attention to "external religion."

"Indeed in most ages of the Church, the care of reasonable men has been, as there has been for the most part occasion, to draw the people off from laying too great weight upon external things; upon formal acts of piety." (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 294)

The Roman church's past abuses, Butler observes, has led to a de-emphasis on external rituals.

"But the state of matters is quite changed now with us. These things are neglected to a degree, which is, and cannot but be attended with a decay of all that is good. It is highly reasonable now to instruct the people in the importance of external religion." (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 294)

The corrective measure, in Butler's view, may have been overdone and it is time to reinstate external religion. Specifically, Butler called for fresh commitment to the worship liturgy, holy sacraments, and baptism.¹⁷ The second notable point is the emphasis that Butler gives to the mundane. In a sermon titled "Upon the Love of our Neighbors," Butler closes with this prayer:

"O Almighty God, inspire us with this divine principle; kill in us all the seeds of envy and ill will; and help us, by cultivating within ourselves the love of our neighbor, to improve in the love of Thee. Thou hast placed us in various kindreds, friendships, and relations, as the school of discipline for our affections; help us, by the due exercise of them, to improve to perfection; till all partial affections be lost in that entire universal one, and Thou, O God, shall be all in all." (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 168)

¹⁷ Butler's plea for renewed attention to external religion opened him to the accusation of being a Roman sympathizer, a charge bearing considerable consequences at that time. Christopher Cunliffe, in his essay "The Spiritual Sovereign," reported the following: "The Durham *Charge* . . . is often read as a homily on the importance of external forms of religion. It was a too literal reading of this kind that gave Butler's opponents the opportunity of accusing him of papist leanings" (Cunliffe, 1999, p. 55).

It is in the humdrum of communal and familial relationships, says Butler, where a person's basic relational skills, i.e., compassion, love, patience, etc, are first molded and then perfected.

G3) Habits

For Butler, balanced attention to both mind and heart is essential for wholesome moral development. Another important theme in Butler's approach is the cultivation of good habits.

“Mankind, and perhaps all finite creatures, from the very constitution of their nature, before habits of virtue, are deficient, and in danger of deviating from what is right; and therefore stand in need of virtuous habits, for a security against this danger.”(Butler, 1900, V2, p. 86)

The path to maturity calls for disciplined and painstaking practices of virtue. Moral adulthood does not come overnight. It is attained by inhabiting a way of life that espouses virtuous habits.

“And thus a new character, in several respects, may be formed; and many habitudes of life, not given by Nature, but which Nature directs us to acquire.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 82)

G4) Priority: Primary and Secondary

A final feature in Butler's project, I submit, is his prioritized approach, giving precedence to a set of core skills.

“So that, without determining what will be the employment and happiness, the particular life, of good men hereafter; there must be some determinate capacities, some necessary character and qualifications, without which persons cannot but be utterly incapable of it: in like manner, as there must be some, without which men would be incapable of their present state of life.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 78)

To sustain a moral life, Butler says, people need to possess some rudimentary aptitude.

This assertion suggests the existence of certain minimal requirements. I submit that the

primary norms discussed earlier represent these implied standards. For example, belief in God is for Butler one essential prerequisite. The above statement also insinuates a priority, i.e., people must first and at the least show competence in these basic norms. In the following passage, Butler urges people to give these norms, which are accessible to all, their first attention.

“If then there be a sphere of knowledge, of contemplation and employment, level to our capacities, and of the utmost importance to us; we ought surely to apply ourselves with all diligence to this our proper business, and esteem everything else nothing, nothing as to us, in comparison of it.” (Butler, 1900, VI, p. 198)

Butler, I argue, gives precedence to a set of primary values. These would include virtues such as truth telling, compassion, justice, etc. Beyond these are secondary norms requiring the lesser skills. As discussed in Section E, he treats these with less urgency and tolerates differences of opinion, e.g., diverse views on the Trinity. Butler, I argue, regards these as second-tiered requirements.

In summation, Butler’s priority is to ensure that people at the least are competent in the primary norms. Once these are attained, attention then moves to developing in a person the skills necessary for the secondary challenges.

H) Butler’s Specific Concerns

Butler recognizes that the realization of the divine telos is both the individual person’s duty and the responsibility of collective leadership. Yet the church, schools, and state as human institutions are not infallible. In 18th century England, there were concerns about leadership in the pulpit, the lectern, and the legislative chambers. Thus, Butler’s vigilance is as much directed at exhorting the masses in the pew as in challenging those entrusted with leadership responsibilities, e.g., bishops, thinkers, and politicians, to fulfill

their moral duty. The task is to ensure that the cathedrals, universities, and Parliament are manned by competent personnel and promote proper cultivation programs. Herein lies Butler's specific concern with Hobbes, the Deists, and Wesley, individuals who assumed various moral leadership positions yet, in Butler's assessment, failed in varying degrees of severity to discharge their duty.

H1) Hobbes

In the face of the atrocities of the 17th century, Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679 AD) came to a dark conclusion which contradicted the conventional assumptions that humanity by nature possessed an innate capability for impartial benevolence. Humans, according to Hobbes, are defined by their most basic passion, a primordial fear of violent death. This fear drives a person wholly towards preservation of the self; therefore, one cannot but act out of self-interest. Captive to the fear of death, human beings, Hobbes claimed, see in others a potential threat to survival, and therefore “life in the state of nature is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” and people are locked in a “war of all against all” (*Leviathan*, p. xiii). Hobbes's restatement of human nature and the state of nature challenged the pre-existing conventional wisdom regarding human community. Hobbes refuted as fallacious the prevailing assumption of humanity as being by nature capable of impartial goodwill. He regarded as naïve and idealistic the Christian vision of humanity living in harmonious co-existence. Instead, said Hobbes, one has to appeal to self-interest in order to hold a human community in place; humans exist on the margins of conflict and the best one can hope for is to attain a *modus vivendi*.

When Hobbes's radical and heretical views trickled down into the public domain, the response was harsh denunciation. In disclaiming order in nature, Hobbes was accused

of denying the existence of an Author and Governor in nature, i.e., God, and of being a closet atheist. Hobbes's implicit denial of God cast a cloud of suspicion on his loyalty to the English crown, which assumed a divine right to rule. Hobbes's views were intellectually shunned and politically condemned and he was forced to flee England for refuge in Holland. Though he was cast out physically, Hobbes's views on ethical egoism appeared not to have been fully uprooted in the English psyche. This led to Butler's famous Rolls Chapel refutation of the lingering Hobbesian shadows.

“The thing to be lamented is, not that men have so great regard to their own good or interest in the present world, for they have not enough; but that they have so little to the good of others. And this seems plainly owing to their being so much engaged in the gratification of particular passions unfriendly to benevolence, and which happen to be most prevalent in them, much more than to self-love. As a proof of this may be observed . . . hard-hearted and totally without feeling in behalf of others; except when they cannot escape the sight of distress, and so are interrupted by it in their pleasures.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 19)

Hobbes, in Butler's assessment, erred in his basic reasoning, leading to a distorted view of nature and human nature. In a footnote to Sermon I, Butler advanced a detailed rebuttal of Hobbes's assertion that the self is driven entirely by egoistic interests.

“Is there not often the appearance of one man's wishing that good to another, which he knows himself unable to procure him; and rejoicing in it, though bestowed by a third person? And can love of power any way possibly come in to account for this desire or delight? Is there not often the appearance of men's distinguishing between two or more persons, preferring one before another, to do good to, in cases where love of power cannot in the least account for the distinction and preference?” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 29, footnote)

If sound reason is applied to analyzing human behavior, Butler argued, then one would recognize that in spite of atrocities, human beings truly possess the capability for selfless, impartial, benevolent acts. Human failure to sustain harmonious co-existence is not due to the fact that people do not possess this capability but rather to their failure to actualize that potential. The remedy therefore lies in exhorting them to virtue rather than egoistic self-interest; only then will they be able to truly overcome the malaise of human conflict.

Within Butler's two-tiered (primary and secondary) cultivation framework, the Hobbesian study program constituted a failure at the primary level. In Butler's judgment, it failed to affirm the primary doctrine necessary for a basic understanding of nature. Specifically, the Hobbesian interpretation of human nature contradicted the foundational knowledge which all people should possess. The Hobbesian spiritual program, in Butler's assessment, neglected to provide the primary rituals to cultivate a basic sensibility, specifically in its disregard of familial relationships. By diminishing the import of basic human ties, Hobbes failed to nurture genuine compassion, i.e., sincerity, in human relationships. The Hobbesians' neglect of the primary norms in the study and spiritual programs meant that they had fundamentally undermined the church's effort to nurture Christians.

In response to Hobbesian mistakes, Butler's corrective measures were twofold. In the study program, his effort was first to refute Hobbes by presenting the correct conceptual interpretation of nature. To this end, Butler presented counterarguments, e.g., in the Sermons, to challenge listeners in the pews to reconsider the true nature of humanity. His task was to ensure that people were schooled in the proper teachings on the state of nature and human relationships. Second, at the level of the spiritual program, his task was to extol the people to exercise genuine benevolence in practical life. In this regard, Butler exhorted all to reclaim the basics of communal life and reestablish the sense of compassion for one's fellow humans.

"To have no restraint from, no regard to others in our behavior, is the speculative absurdity of considering ourselves as single and independent, as having nothing in our nature which has respect to our fellow-creatures, reduced to action and practice." (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 34)

Hobbes's historical standing in England was precarious. The Church of England had no patience for his views. Butler, like the Church in general, regarded Hobbes's perspective as a fundamental violation of core beliefs and denied him communion in the Anglican order. The English state's treatment of Hobbes was harsher still. His loyalty to the crown was questioned, and fearful of treason charges, he fled to continental Europe to seek political refuge.¹⁸ Seventeenth century England was not ready and did not have room for Hobbes's radical views.

H2) Deists¹⁹

Deism was another movement that arose out of the ashes of the religious atrocities of the 17th century. While Hobbes blamed human nature for the brutality of life, the Deists saw violence as rooted in the enforcement of inherently unfair standards. Humans in general and the church in particular, in the Deists' assessment, imposed on each other expectations and rules that are subjective and injudicious. They regarded the Christian's exclusive claim of special revelation as inherently problematic. The following quote from William Stephens' *An Account of the Growth of Deisms in England* (1696) provides a snapshot of Deist cynicism towards Christianity's esoteric assertions.

“I have known some, who have alleged as a reason why they have forsaken the Christian faith, the impossibility of believing. Many doctrines (say these) are made necessary to salvation, which 'tis impossible to believe, because they are in their nature absurdities. I replied, that these things were mysteries, and so above our understanding. But he asked me to what end could an unintelligible doctrine

¹⁸ Hobbes was under constant threat of being charged with heresy, which in 17th century England carried the penalty of death. He sought temporary refuge in Holland and later felt safe to return to England when the young king, Charles II, Hobbes's former pupil, took a personal interest in ensuring Hobbes welfare.

¹⁹ This analysis is an overview of 17th century English Deism. For more substantive studies, the following secondary sources are recommended. Peter Gay, 1968, *Deism, An Anthology*; Graham Waring, 1967, *Deism and Natural Religion*; and Roland Stromberg, 1954, *Religious Pluralism in 18th Century England*.

be revealed? Not to instruct, but to puzzle and amuse. What can be the effect of an unintelligible mystery upon our minds, but only an amusement? That which is only above reason must be above a rational belief, and must I be saved by an irrational belief? . . . You all agree that the belief of your Trinity is absolutely necessary to salvation, and yet widely differ in what we must believe concerning it; whether three Minds or Modes, or Properties, or internal Relations, or Manifestations, or external Denominations; or else no more than a Holy Three, or Three Somewhats . . . If I should be persuaded that an explanation of the Trinity were necessary to save my soul, and see the Learned so widely differing and hotly disputing what it is I must believe concerning it, I should certainly run mad through despair of finding out the Truth.” (Stephens, pp. 19-20)

In the Deists’ assessment, special revelation involves an arbitrarily chosen constituency to which truth is revealed and results in sectarianism, breeding hostility between groups and generating unjust intolerance. Furthermore, Christian sects immorally imposed dictums based on special revelation upon other Christians (e.g., Catholics imposing their beliefs on Protestants and vice versa) and upon non-Christians (e.g., “pagans” in the colonies). The Deists believed that the human community needed a more universal and objective set of principles. To that end, they presented two sets of key arguments. First, they appealed to reason as a leveling tool. They saw in reason a universal ruler by which to judge moral beliefs and behavior. John Toland expressed this position in the following way.

“There is nothing that men make a greater noise about than the ‘mysteries of the Christian religion.’ The divines gravely tell us ‘we must adore what we cannot comprehend.’ Some of them say the ‘mysteries of the Gospel’ are to be understood only in the sense of the ‘ancient fathers.’ . . . [Some] contend [that] some mysteries may be, or at least seem to be, contrary to reason, and yet received by faith. [Others contend] that no mystery is contrary to reason, but that all are ‘above’ it.” (John Toland, quoted in Gay, 1968, pp. 12)

Against the church’s seemingly contradictory and disjointed efforts to reconcile the mysteries of Christianity with reason, Toland advanced this proposition:

“On the contrary, we hold that reason is the only foundation of all certitude, and that nothing revealed, whether as to its manner or existence, is more exempted from its disquisitions than the ordinary phenomena of nature. Wherefore, we likewise maintain, according to the title of this discourse, that *there is nothing in*

the Gospel contrary to reason, nor above it; and that no Christian doctrine can be properly called a mystery” (John Toland, quoted in Gay, 1968, pp. 12)

Second, the Deists cast a skeptical eye on Christian special revelation, considering it an extreme, sense-based interpretation of nature and God, and rejected certain beliefs central to Christianity. One key principle was the denial of the existence of an engaged deity. The Deists hoped that by elevating the rule of reason they would broaden the tent to embrace all regardless of creed and abate the dreadful excesses of the 17th century. The poet Alexander Pope (1688–1744) gave voice to a common Deist sentiment:

“Nature and Nature’s law lay hid in night.
God said: ‘Let Newton be’, and all was light.”
(quoted in Waring, 1900, p. vi)

The Deist movement took a long time to evolve, having its origins in the late 16th century before emerging as an identifiable group in the late 17th century. The movement drew from different segments of the English intelligentsia.²⁰ Even after the Deists became an organized group, their exact identity remained murky and their views, though sharing a general coherency, were not necessarily unified. The reaction from the English establishment was mixed. There was no outright condemnation like that which Hobbes faced. Yet the Anglican order was concerned with what they perceived as the Deists’ paring down of religion.

Butler’s *Analogy of Religion* was his effort to provide an apology for Christian core beliefs.²¹ In an advertisement tract introducing the *Analogy*, he described the Deist treatment of the Christian faith as bordering on irreverence.

²⁰ Among those assigned the Deist label were Lord Hebert of Cherbury (d. 1648), Charles Blount (1654–1693), Matthew Tindal (1657–1733), John Toland (1670–1722), and Anthony Collins (1676–1729).

²¹ *The Analogy of Religion* was Butler’s reaction to the Deist movement. However, Butler’s polemic was not directed at a specific figure (though Matthew Tindal and John Toland were his near contemporaries) or addressed towards particular works (though Toland’s 1696 work

“It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted, by many persons, that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry, but that it is, now at length, discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it, as if, in the present age, this was an agreed point among all people of discernment, and nothing remained, but to set it up as a principle subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals, for its having so long interrupted the pleasure of the world.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. xvii)

The Deists’ effort to install reason-based universal norms, in Butler’s view, resulted in an overreaction against the sensibility of the Christian creed. Their attempts to eradicate “superstitions” resulted in excessive skepticism. Specifically, Butler was critical of the Deists’ dismissal of key beliefs based on special revelation. In the *Analogy*, Butler’s counterarguments were focused on two key doctrines, the immortality of the soul, i.e., the afterlife, and the existence of a reward and punishment scheme that extended beyond the present life.

“There is a connection between the present and the future life, where the present life’s governance of reward and punishment extends to the next . . . that there is nothing incredible in the general doctrine of religion that God will reward and punish men for their actions hereafter.” (Butler, 1900, V2, p. 42)

Butler’s apologetic strategy was to first caution the Deists against placing too much confidence in human reason. The human capability to acquire knowledge, Butler reminded his readers, is constrained by ignorance, and human understanding remains in large part based on “probable” evidence. Nevertheless, humans can and do make confident decisions based on such plausible proof. For example, says Butler, the Deists were prepared on the basis of probable evidence from nature to accept God as the governor of nature. Now, he argued, if probability is an adequate guide in the realm of nature, then should it not also be a sufficient guide in matters of religion and morality? Such approximate knowledge, for Butler, is itself a reliable and essential guide to life and

Christianity Not Mysterious was at that time the preeminent Deist work). Butler chose to set the argument at the general level above any individual or works. See Peter Gray’s 1968 book *Deism*,

sufficient for moral action. The crux of Butler's argument lies in shifting the onus to the skeptics. For Butler, the claims of special revelation are true until proven otherwise. If there is no positive proof that death is the destruction of human creatures, then says Butler, one ought to take serious the claim of a future life since it is so explicitly affirmed in revelation.

“Were the evidence of religion no more than doubtful, then it ought not to be concluded false any more than true, nor denied any more than affirmed; for suspense would be the reasonable state of mind with regard to it. And then it ought in all reason, considering its infinite importance, to have nearly the same influence upon practice, as if it were thoroughly believed. For would it not be madness for a man to forsake a safe road, and prefer it to one in which he acknowledges there is an even chance he should lose his life, though there were an even chance likewise of his getting safe through it?” (Charge at Durham, Butler, 1900, V1, p. 289)²²

In the main, Butler critiqued the Deist project as overly rationalistic, neglecting a nurturing of the senses.

Within the framework of cultivation, Butler in general faulted the Deists for an unequal attention to the study program vis-à-vis the spiritual program, giving undue attention to intellectual exercises with no equivalent focus on nurturing the senses.

Within Butler's two-tiered (primary and secondary) model, the Deists' neglect of the senses was mainly reflected in the secondary norms. The Deists' study program affirmed the primary doctrines but advanced secondary teachings that he regarded as barren, for example, the Deists' pared-down interpretation of the divine as an indifferent deity.

An Anthology.

²² Penelhum has contrasted Butler's appeal to probability with Pascal's "wager" argument: "Butler's position is in one respect more radical than that of Pascal. Pascal assumes he is addressing a situation in which reason can tell us nothing about which of the two alternatives is more likely; so he assumes their relative likelihoods to be equivalent. Butler is suggesting that the wise man would considering acting on the assumption that Christianity is true even if the likelihood of its being true is much less than the likelihood of its being false – although he himself does not assess its relative likelihood so pessimistically" (Penelhum, 1985, p. 92).

In response to the Deist overemphasis on the rational, Butler's corrective effort was aimed at renewing a focus on the senses. In general, he appealed to the Deists to devote effort to the nurturing of one's moral sensibility. More specifically, in terms of the study program, he sought to correct the Deists' erroneous reasoning with his *Analogy of Religion*, an apologetic treatise to defend Christian fundamentals, particularly the doctrine of the afterlife. His goal was to challenge people to exercise sound reasoning to counter what he perceived as erroneous reasoning. In terms of the spiritual program, Butler appealed for more attention to external religion, i.e., Christian rituals. The Deists' neglect of religious rituals undermined their sense capability. The restoration of external religion was key.

“Our Reformers considering that some of these observances were in themselves wrong and superstitious, abolished them, reduced the form of religion to great simplicity . . . nor left anything more of what was external in religion, than was in a manner necessary to preserve a sense of religion itself upon the minds of the people. But a great of this is neglected by the generality amongst us; for instance, the service of the Church, not only upon common days, but also upon saints' days, and several other things might be mentioned. Thus they have no customary admonition, no public call to recollect the thoughts of God and religion from one Sunday to another.” (Butler, 1900, VI, p. 293)

The Deists' historical standing in 18th century England was mixed. To be sure, they maintained a pseudo-underground existence and were not an organized group as was the case with the Methodists. The Deists never pontificated from one organized body, nor presented a coherent and complete articulation of their beliefs. And there was ongoing controversy over who exactly was involved in the movement (Isaac Newton was purportedly a closet Deist). The general intellectual climate in England during the nascent Age of Reason was receptive towards the Deist position. Nevertheless, the English ecclesiastical mainstream was not ready to embrace the Deist line of thought, and their views continued to face criticism, though not outright hostility. Conceptually, Butler

rated Deism as a secondary error and tolerated its irreverence. The Church of England's reaction to the Deists was mild compared to the criticism meted out to Hobbes. The political elites were more sympathetic towards the Deists, not least because some in their ranks, e.g., John Locke, were, if not Deist in name, persuaded by certain Deist arguments.

H3) Wesley

The English crisis gave rise to Hobbes and the Deists, who responded with skeptical rebukes of conventional religious norms as uncritically sentimental. In John Wesley (1703–1791 AD), one encounters a reverse diagnosis of the ills that caused the 17th century atrocities. According to Wesley, the moral collapse was due to a failure to affirm Christian fundamentals, specifically the lack of spirituality that led people into heinous behavior. Wesley was concerned that the prevailing mood of cynicism and the drive to rid faith of superstition had diluted the Christian creed.

“Thus almost all men of letters, both in England, France, Germany, yea, and all the civilized countries of Europe, extol ‘humanity’ to the skies, as the very essence of religion. To this the great triumvirate, Rousseau, Voltaire, and David Hume, have contributed all their labors, spring no pains to establish a religion which should stand on its own foundation, independent of any revelation whatever, yea, not supposing even the being of a God. So leaving him, if he was any being, to himself, they have found out both a religion and a happiness which have no relation at all to God, nor any dependence upon him. It is no wonder that this religion should grow far and wide in the world. But call it ‘humanity’, ‘virtue’, ‘morality’, or what you please, it is neither better nor worse than atheism.” (quoted in Rivers, 1991, V1, p. 231)

Wesley's response was to plead for a defense of the basic Christian tenets. And contrary to the mainstream diagnosis that unchecked senses were the cause of moral dereliction, Wesley sought to reclaim Christian sensibility. Thus, central to his project was a reassertion of the Holy Spirit's role in moral discernment. While in Oxford, Wesley founded a highly disciplined movement later known as Methodism which placed an

emphasis on nurturing piety through fervent prayers, invoking the Holy Spirit as the direct means to discern the divine will.

“I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.” (quoted in Rivers, 1991, V1, p. 235)

John Wesley began his ministerial career in the Anglican order. The earnestness and methodological manner of his ministry were not received warmly by the church hierarchy. Wesley subsequently left the Church of England to lead his new movement. Within the English religious spectrum, Methodism can be placed alongside the non-conformist Puritanical tradition. The establishment’s view of the non-conformist in general and of Wesley in particular was that they aspired to greater moral clarity via private piety but remained captive to a bygone era of unchecked sentimentalism.²³ In Butler’s view, Wesley’s effort to restore faith and spirituality in Christianity erred excessively towards the senses.²⁴ Wesley failed to maintain the delicate balancing of reason and sense. His effort to restore religious fervor resulted in an inadequate attention to reason. Butler was particularly concerned with Wesley’s self-assuredness in discerning the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

²³ This is an overview of 18th century English Methodism. For a fuller study, the following works are recommended. V. H. H. Green, 1961, *The Young Mr. Wesley: A Study of John Wesley and Oxford*; Harry Rack, 1993, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 2nd ed.; Isabel Rivers, 1991, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, V.I and II; Samuel Rogal, 1983, *John and Charles Wesley*; and John Telford, 1898, *The Life of John Wesley*.

²⁴ One known encounter between Butler and Wesley was at the Bristol diocese when the young Methodist preacher was barred by Bishop Butler from administering communion. Beyond this known incident, Butler never addressed Wesley directly, only expressing his disapproval with general criticism of the Methodists’ perceived excessive “enthusiasm.” As a matter of fact, what is known of their contact was recorded in Wesley’s own diary. (That portion of Wesley’s diary is reprinted in full in Gladstone’s edition of Butler’s work, 1896, V2, p. 432.)

“Sir, the pretending to extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing, a very horrid thing.” (Recorded in Wesley’s diary and reprinted in full in Gladstone’s edition of Butler’s work, 1896, V2, p. 432)

In the main, Butler faulted the Methodist project as being overly sensational, neglecting to nurture the mind.²⁵ Within the cultivation framework, Butler critiqued the Methodists in general for their unbalanced attention to the spiritual program vis-à-vis the study program, devoting more time to spiritual meditation with no equivalent commitment to study.

In response to Wesley’s excesses, Butler sought to enforce two sets of corrective measures. First, he made a general appeal to employ sound reason. Butler called for cool reflection to check the Methodists’ overconfidence in the Holy Spirit. Second, He called specifically for attention to external religion. He objected to Wesley’s undisciplined form of sense cultivation, i.e., informal prayer without proper liturgy and order. Methodist religiosity was an excessively nonconformist Holy Spirit-led ritual with scant regard for traditionally held external forms. In Butler’s assessment, the ministry of the spirit needed to be guided by proper external forms to prevent unruly practices. The Methodists needed to cultivate the senses in the proper context of traditional and tested religious rituals

Wesley’s standing in England was not uncontroversial. His ministry began in the Anglican fold but his ideas were eventually labeled as nonconformist at best and heretical at worst. The Church of England initially accommodated Wesley until he later felt compelled to part with the Anglican order to lead the Methodist movement. Conceptually, Butler regarded Wesley’s excesses as secondary errors and tolerated the Methodists’

²⁵ This account of Butler’s reaction to Wesley is inferred. Butler had expressed concern with the Methodists’ perceived excessive enthusiasm, yet he never directly or extensively addressed Wesley. With little record of their exchanges, this analysis is a conjecture of Butler’s responses

idiosyncrasies, though there was a recorded incident when Bishop Butler denied Wesley the license to minister in the Bristol diocese. While Wesley encountered some friction with the ecclesiastical authorities, the English political establishment in the early 18th century had created a sanctuary for nonconformists such as Wesley; thus, the Methodists under the protection of the English state secured their rights and enjoyed liberty of religious expression.

Chapter Conclusion

Joseph Butler left his Presbyterian roots to join the Church of England and ascended the Anglican hierarchy to become the Bishop of Durham, second only to the Bishop of Canterbury in rank. While one among the many famous 17th and 18th century English notables, e.g., Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hume among others, who preceded or succeeded him, the Bishop did leave behind his own distinguished intellectual and moral legacy. His *Analogy of Religion* formed the core curriculum of the Oxford education until the mid 19th century. In the late 19th century, the illustrious Prime Minister W. E. Gladstone compiled and republished Butler's collected sermons and the *Analogy*, giving them the strongest endorsement from the political establishment. And the Catholic Bishop of Oxford, John Newman, accorded by far the highest tribute to Butler, extolling the Bishop as "the greatest name in the Anglican Church" (quoted in Penelhum, 1985, p. 4).²⁶

based on the general Anglican reaction to the Methodists. The secondary resources relied upon include Isabel Rivers' 1991 two-volume work on the 17th and 18th century English movements.²⁶ For an additional biographical account of Butler's life, see William J. Norton, 1940, *Bishop Butler: Moral and Divine* (p. 1-5) and Terence Penelhum, 1985, *Butler* (p. 1-6).

Butler's main project was to restore the English moral compass and his efforts bore three distinctive features. First, he was recognized as a leveling voice of restraint in an England undergoing cross-currents of change. At one level, there was the dominant drift propelled by the Age of Reason, moving the mainstream intelligentsia towards a diminished reverence for the mysterious in general and for Christianity in particular. Butler reacted to curb this slide with his apologetic work *Analogy of Religion*. At another level were the undercurrents of a bygone faith that continued to promulgate proclamations unchecked by reason. Butler responded to stem this flow backward with his critique of Wesley's undue enthusiasm. In addressing the excesses on both ends, Butler proffered himself as a moderating force in a sea of change. Second, his exposés on conscience were recognized as a distinctive piece of moral exegesis. Christianity has a longstanding moral tradition that anchors conscience as *the* authority; this tradition dates from St. Paul and was expressed in the middle ages in Thomas Aquinas' expositions and continued with Luther's famous invocation of conscience as the foundation for his reformation. Butler followed in the footsteps of this revered lineage and provided some unique insights into conscience's role, specifically by presenting conscience as the arbitrator between self-love and benevolence and the moderator between reason and sense. Third, his exhortation to individual conscientiousness had social implications. England in the 18th century was experiencing an upheaval that was transforming individual identity vis-à-vis external authority. Locke's theory of rights empowered the self, and as a consequence, the influence of the traditional institutional authorities (i.e., monarchy, church, and state) on the individual waned. Butler's invocation of conscience shifted the focus of moral initiative to the individual, reminding the people that although

rights and liberty are to be cherished, they do come with moral responsibility. In a sermon preached before the House of Lords, Butler warned his fellow Englishman not to use “your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 230). Thus, for Butler, as traditional external moral authority declined, the internal power of conscience was to take a more prominent role as one’s moral guide.

Butler’s most crucial message to his fellow countrymen was perhaps his appeal to hold on to the Christian hope. England had moved beyond the 17th century atrocities, yet a pall of gloom lingered in the English psyche as a subtle shade of Hobbesian melancholy continued to enfeeble Christian ideals. Butler’s sermons and *Analogy* were crafted to lift that downcast spirit. To be sure, he was mindful of human fallibility and the precariousness of Christianity’s lofty aspirations. Yet human failure should not nullify the divine plan. These setbacks, in Butler’s perspective, are not due to unrealistic goals but to people’s ineptitude in activating and nurturing their moral potential. He pleaded for a sober diagnosis of the moral crisis and cautioned against a rash dismissal of the sacred telos. Even when there is uneven moral development across human history, humanity’s goal is not entirely marooned. One ought to hold on to the Christian faith in God and in the God-given human capability to achieve the goal of harmonious co-existence.

Butler’s vision may be summed up in two key doctrines. The first is the vision of a common humanity that conveys the Christian faith in human possibility, humanity’s capacity for harmonious co-existence. This vision extols belief in one’s own moral potential and confidence in the capability of one’s fellow humans. It calls on us to regard each other as worthy of dignity, a recognition which is an end in itself. The second is a doctrine of God which stresses the recognition that the human project is actually the

realization of the divine will and that the vision of harmonious co-existence cannot be fulfilled without an appeal to the divine power. For Butler, these two doctrines are the foundation of the human project. People may disagree over the best approaches to realize the human telos, as was the case with the Deists and Methodists, yet for Butler this is no justification to jettison these two fundamentals. History and human events may at times betray the Christian ideal, yet for Butler one must reaffirm the faith in one's fellow human beings and in the transcendent and not abandon the core beliefs, as Hobbes did. The central message of Christianity is to hold firm to the faith in human possibility, in the capability of one's fellow human beings, and in God's benevolence even in the face of conceptual disagreements and historical anomalies.

“The conclusion is, that in all lowliness of mind we set lightly by ourselves: that we form our temper to an implicit submission to the Divine Majesty; beget with ourselves an absolute resignation to all the methods of His providence, in His dealing with the children of men: that, in the deepest humility of our soul, we prostrate ourselves before Him, and join in that celestial song; ‘Great and marvelous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of Saint! Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name?’” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 200)

Chapter 3: Wang Yang-Ming's Conception of Liang-Chih

In the annals of Chinese history, the rulers of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 CE) can boast of unmatched accomplishments, not least their maritime exploration of Southeast and West Asia. The Ming Dynasty's glory, however, was marred by a less savory element, something which historians refer to as "Ming Despotism." The Ming's susceptibility to tyrannical rule was evident early when, at the founding of the dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–1398 CE) abolished the Prime Minister's office to consolidate his Imperial power. The curtailment of the oversight provided by the Palace's outer court left the state more at the mercies of the Emperor and his inner circle of attendants. The second half of the Ming era witnessed the dreadful consequences of the state's weakened checks and balances as the dynasty descended into tyrannical rule, with the convergence of incompetent personalities at all levels of governance: the throne was occupied by inept rulers, the Imperial inner courts were overrun by wily eunuchs, and the already curtailed outer courts were manned by corrupt Neo-Confucian scholar-official-bureaucrats.

"In our days those employed in government service return home loaded with wealth . . . They use their authority and influence without restraint. They luxuriate in sumptuous banquets and even their servants wear silk and clothes of fine quality . . ." (quoted in Albert Chan, 1982, p. 297)

Wang Yang-Ming's (1472–1529 CE) illustrious career, in which he served as a philosopher, magistrate, censor, provincial governor, and military general, was set in this troubled period of the Ming Dynasty. As an official in the state machinery, he experienced firsthand the wrath of a "routinized" Imperial court (he was at one point exiled for defending a fellow bureaucrat against a powerful Palace eunuch).²⁷ As a

²⁷ The eunuch Liu Chin had usurped the power of the Emperor. In 1506, when the Tai Hsien (policy review adviser) and others protested, Liu put them in prison. Wang immediately presented

teacher-philosopher he was concerned with what was perceived as the prevailing educational system's moral bankruptcy.

“There is only one *Tao* . . . the mediocre Confucian scholars all start from a partial view of it, and embellish their image with comparisons and imitations giving expression to it through divisions of chapter and sentences and borrowed explanations. They are used to such practices, which can instill enough self-confidence producing sections and items which give them a sense of make-believe security, with which they can deceive themselves and others, remaining in this pitfall for a whole lifetime without realizing it.” (Wang Yang-Ming's letter to *Tsuo Shou-yi*, quoted in Ching, 1976, p. 161)²⁸

Wang's moral diagnosis was the time-tested Confucian one: humanity had lost the *Tao* (道, the Way). The Ming, said Wang, needed to rediscover the way of the *Tien* (天, Heaven). To the ruling class, Wang exhorted a revitalization of *jen* (仁, spirit) to reinvigorate a fossilized state machinery that had turned into “dry wood and dead ashes” (Wang, 1985, p. 143).²⁹ And to the masses, his call was for a restoration of *jen* to a communal life beset by petty egoism. While Confucian in essence, Wang's appeal stood apart for his imploration to his fellow Ming to heed *liang-chih* (良心, conscience), the personal innate moral compass that will lead them back to the Tao. This chapter is an examination of the Confucian response in general and Wang's reaction in particular to the Ming era's moral crisis.³⁰

a memorial in their defense. This angered the eunuch and Wang was ordered to be beaten forty strokes before the emperor. In addition, he was banished to Lung-chang to become an insignificant executive in a dispatch station. (Wang, 1985, p. xxiv)

²⁸ For a broader historical account of the Ming Dynasty's challenges, see Albert Chan's *The Glory and Fall of the Ming Dynasty* (1982) and James Tong's *Disorder Under Heaven, Collective Violence in the Ming Dynasty* (1991).

²⁹ “Routinization” and “fossilization” are Weber's terms and diagnosis of the inertia that afflicted the Chinese and Confucian moral order. See Weber's *Religion in China*, chapter 6 (1951).

³⁰ The first chapter of Julia Ching's *To Acquire Wisdom: The Way of Wang Yang-ming* (1951) contains a detailed presentation of Wang's life. For a closer study of the early years of Wang's moral development, see Tu Wei-Ming's *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action: Wang Yang-ming's Youth (1472 – 1509)* (1976).

A) Moral Vision

In times of crisis, as in the late Ming, the Confucians were drawn to introspection. What wrong had humankind committed to err from the *Tao* and incur *Tien's* wrath? For the Confucians, the task was to regain *Tien's* favor and rally the people back to the way of *Tao*. Who is *Tien* and what is the *Tao* humanity is expected to actualize?

The *Tien*, in the Confucian worldview, is the divine authority presiding over the cosmic order. The ancient *Book of Odes* depicted *Tien* as being involved in the natural order and also the human realm, specifically by expressing concern in the affairs of the House of Chou (1111-249 BCE)

“*Tien* produces the teeming multitude. As there are things, there are their specific principles. When the people keep to their normal nature, they will love their excellent virtue. *Tien*, looking down upon the House of Chou, sees that its light reaches the people below. And to protect the Son of *Tien*, gave birth to Chung Shan-fu [to help him].” (*Book of Odes*, quoted in Chan, 1963, p. 5)

Classical Confucianism encapsulates *Tien's* desire in the *Tao*, often expressed as the quest for oneness. In the human realm, the doctrine is translated as the mission to realize the harmonious co-existence of all as one family.

“When the Great *Tao* was practiced, the world was shared by all alike. The worthy and the able were promoted to office and men practiced good faith and lived in affection. Therefore, they did not regard as parents only their own parents, or sons only their own sons. The aged found a fitting close to their lives, the robust their proper employment; the young were provided with an upbringing and the widow and widower, the orphaned and the sick, with proper care. Men had their tasks and women their hearths . . . This was the age of Great Unity.” (from *Ta-T'ung*, quoted in *Confucianism and Christianity*, Ching, 1977, p. 203)

Centuries later, Wang rearticulated this familial theme, describing the Sage as embarking on a personal quest to embrace all humanity as kindred.

“He looks upon all people of the world, whether inside or outside his family, or whether far or near, but all the blood and breath, as his brothers and children. He wants to secure, preserve, educate and nourish all of them, so as to fulfill his desire of forming one body with all things.” (Wang, 1985, p. 118)

To the classical Confucian vision Wang also introduced radical updates. Reflecting the Neo-Confucian outlook, he extended the theme of human oneness to include “forming one body with all things.” Humanity’s *Tao*, Wang declared, is to ultimately achieve a holistic synchronization with all things, animate and inanimate.

“For at bottom Heaven, Earth, the myriad things, and man form one body . . . Wind, rain, dew, thunder, sun and moon, stars, animals and plants, mountains and rivers, earth and stones are essentially one body with man.” (Wang, 1985, p. 221)

Wang then explained that humankind is not left unaided in the quest for this grand vision. A governing principle called the *Tien Li* (☐ ☐, Heaven Principle) has been set in place to empower the cosmic and human orders.

“It is the nature of man and things, it is the *Tien Li*. Only with this nature can there be the principle of regeneration . . . when this creative principle of the nature of man and things emanates . . . All this is the growth and development of the *Tien Li*.” (Wang, 1985, p. 47)

And the *Tien Li*, Wang added, resides in the human self, specifically in *hsin* (☐, heart/mind).

“The essence of *hsin* is nothing other than *Tien-Li*. It is originally never out of accord with *li*. This is your true self. This true self is the master of your physical body. Without the true self there is no physical body. With it, one lives, without it, one dies.” (Wang, 1985, p. 80-81)

Wang’s assertion of *hsin* as the repository of *Tien Li* is another rendition of the fundamental Confucian doctrine of humankind’s innate moral potential. For Wang, the human quest to decipher *Tien* and to fulfill the *Tao* begins from deep within oneself, the *hsin*.

“If one knows how to search for the *Tao* inside the *hsin* and to see the substance of one’s own mind, then there is no place nor time where the *Tao* is not to be found. It pervades the past and present and is without beginning or end . . . The *hsin* is the *Tao*, and the *Tao* is *Tien*. If one knows the *hsin*, he knows both the *Tao* and *Tien*.” (Wang, 1985, p. 47)

In one classical depiction, humankind is presented not as mere scripted actors but active players with a pivotal role in *Tien's* divine drama:

“The order of human society is produced and maintained by the purposeful cooperation of *Tien*, spirits, and men of good will in the face of what seems to be the inherently centrifugal tendencies of the pluralistic, recalcitrant world of the ‘ten thousand things.’” (*Book of Odes*, quoted in Chan, 1963, p. 15)

Wang advances an even bolder declaration: the Sage is indispensable to the *Tao's* realization. Here is how he describes, in first person, the Sage's place in the cosmic scheme.

“My clear intelligence is the master of heaven and earth and spiritual beings. If heaven is deprived of my clear intelligence, who is going to look into its height? If earth is deprived of my clear intelligence, who is going to look into its depth? If spiritual beings are deprived of my clear intelligence, who is going to distinguish their good and evil fortune or the calamities and blessings that they will bring? Separated from my clear intelligence, there will be no heaven, earth, spiritual beings, or myriad things, and separated from these, there will not be my clear intelligence.” (Wang, 1985, p. 257-258)

In Wang's vision, humankind's role is distinctively critical. The *Tao's* realization is as much *Tien's* prerogative as it is contingent upon human cooperation. If every person conforms to the *Tien Li* in their *hsin*, harmony will reign. And if people transgress the *Tao*, chaos will then descend on earth.

B) *The Chun Tzu*

Placing humankind in a pivotal role, Wang's project is centered on cultivating the moral self which, in conjunction with *Tien*, would work to realize the *Tao*. To that end, the *Chun Tzu* (□ □, the gentleman) was held up as the model of one who has attained the acumen and stature to fulfill the *Tao*. And in this idealization the qualities sought in the *Chun Tzu*, I argue, may be categorized into two sets of skills: practical and conceptual.

B1) Practical Knowledge

One Confucian maxim is the human being's innate compassion for his or her fellow human. Mencius points to people's instinctive commiseration on seeing a child fallen into a well as the quintessential evidence of a human being's natural concern for all. This capability for benevolence represents moral acumen of the practical genre, a form of knowledge enabling one to respond appropriately to exigencies.

In an exegesis on *hsin*, Wang defined moral knowledge in these practical and relational terms.

“Knowledge is the original substance of the *hsin*. The *hsin* is naturally able to know. When it perceives the parent, it naturally knows that one should be filial. When it perceives the elder brother, it naturally knows that one should be respectful.” (Wang, 1985, p. 15)

For Wang the ability to manage one's familial interactions is a key component of what constitutes knowledge. Wang then set the expectation on the *Chun Tzu* in terms of human relationships.

“The superior man is affectionate to his parents and humane to all people.” (Wang, 1985, p. 6)

The ideal self is one who possesses moral acumen of the practical form, the ability to deal with the intricacies of human exigencies.

B2) Conceptual Knowledge

In addition to practical wisdom, the *Chun Tzu* is one who possesses sound intellect. This entails the skills needed to deal with complex disputes over doctrines or beliefs. Wang's entanglement with Chu Hsi over the “*ko wu*” controversy is one example of such an intricate argument, i.e., does *Tien Li* reside inside or outside the human self?

In light of these conceptual challenges, a key objective in Wang's project is to ensure that students are trained in robust critical thinking.

“. . . I hold that in seeking to acquire the ability to do things, we call the seeking study. In seeking to dispel doubts, we call it inquiry. In seeking to understand an idea of a doctrine, we call it thinking. In seeking to examine the idea carefully, we call it sifting.” (Wang, 1985, p. 100)

The aim is to sharpen a person's conceptual thinking to achieve clarity in understanding.

Wang's enunciation of the teacher's and student's responsibilities puts added emphasis on this aspect of moral development.

“The Master, by good order, skillfully leads a man along and teaches him. He taught me to broaden myself with literature and restrain myself with rules of propriety,’ he said so after he had thoroughly understood the way. How skillfully it is in leading and teaching people to broaden them with literature and restrain them with rules of propriety! The student must think it over. It was difficult even for the Sage to tell people about the Way in its total reality. The student must study and come to understanding by himself.” (Wang, 1985, p. 53)

In summation, I argue that, in Wang's project, the person best placed to realize the *Tao*, i.e., the *Chun Tzu*, is one who has acquired two sets of skills. This person has honed his or her practical wisdom to respond to life exigencies and cultivated his or her intellectual vigor to resolve complex conceptual challenges.

C) *The Moral Anatomy*

In pursuing the *Tao*, the moral self requires practical and conceptual discernment. And in Wang's scheme, the faculty that guides this process consists of two key elements, Mencius' *hsin* and Wang's own rendition of *liang-chih*.³¹

³¹ In *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mencius and Wang Yang-ming* (1990), Philip Ivanhoe presents an interesting contrasting of Mencius and Wang's versions of the moral self and approaches to moral cultivation.

C1) *Hsin*.³²

Mencius' (372–289 BCE) *hsin* is the key Confucian conception of the moral self, an umbrella term for two pairs of concepts referred to as the four gems.

The first pair is *chih* (知) and *yi* (義), usually interpreted as intelligent awareness and sense of righteousness, respectively. *Chih* and *yi* may be treated as the equivalents of reason and sense, respectively. They enable a person by means of the mind and the heart to discern the *Tien Li*, to ascertain the moral right or wrong, and to act properly.

The next pair is *li* (禮), commonly translated as rites, and *jen* (仁), regarded as the spirit of benevolence. *Li* and *jen* have been considered the equivalents of external form and internal spirit, respectively. In Mencius' rendition, *li* and *jen* are the manifestations or demonstrations of *chih* and *yi* in action.

In the first instance, *chih* and *yi* guide a person through the external ritual (*li*) process of moral deliberation (for example, a person decides on and then performs the filial duty of caring for his sick parents). *Chih* and *yi* shape the external expression of the action, i.e., the *li* of caring for one's parents. Beyond the external *li*, *chih*, and *yi* also guide a person to perform the *li* with the proper spirit, *jen*, i.e., with sincerity.

³² Important scholarship has gone into interpreting and translating *hsin* and its four “gems,” *chih*, *yi*, *li*, and *jen*. Among the authoritative works on these seminal concepts are Tu Wei-Ming's *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (1980) and *Humanity and Self-Cultivation* (1990), Irene Bloom's *Mencius' Arguments on Human Nature* (1994) and *Human Nature and Biological Nature in Mencius* (1997), and David Hall and Roger Ames' *Thinking Through Confucius* (1987), *Anticipating China* (1995), and *Thinking from the Han* (1998).

In Mencius' conception of *hsin*, reason and sense first guide a person to the proper act, i.e., *li*, and then ensure that he performs the act properly, i.e., with the proper *jen*.

C2) *Liang-Chih*

With Mencius's notion of *hsin*, the classical Confucians envisioned the human person as possessing the potential to discern moral right or wrong. To be sure, they were also mindful that this capability is not yet fully actualized. Therefore, a person may fail to develop the proper judgment. Nevertheless, the Confucians believed that the moral self possesses innate self-correcting ability. In the first instance, *hsin* is designated with this critical function.

“In its capacity as the master of the body, it is called the *hsin*. Basically the original substance of the *hsin* is none other than the *Tien Li*, and is never out of accord with propriety. This is your true self.” (Wang, 1985, p. 81)

Wang then compared *hsin*'s oversight to a system of nerves, inflicting pain to awaken a person to his or her erroneous ways.

“. . . whenever the least desire to act out of accord with the rules of propriety germinates and becomes active, you will feel as though cut with a knife and stuck with a needle, the feeling will be unbearable, and will not stop until the knife and the needle are removed.” (Wang, 1985, p. 81)

Wang did not limit this self-checking ability to *hsin*. He introduced a new term, *liang-chih*, to which he attributed such supervisory functions. *Liang-chih*, says Wang, acts like a mirror, providing a person with unblemished moral reflection.

“*Liang-chih* always knows and always shines. It is like a bright mirror, hung [on the wall]. The things which appear before it cannot conceal their beauty or ugliness.” (Wang, 1985, p. 52)

Liang-chih, Wang added, is acutely aware of right or wrong and is on constant guard as it were to arrest errors whenever they arise.

“Whenever a thought or a wish arises, my mind’s faculty of innate knowledge itself is always conscious of it. Whether it is good or evil, my mind’s innate knowing faculty itself also knows it.” (Wang, 1985, p. 279)

In an extended elaboration, Wang asserts that to defy one’s *liang-chih* is to misidentify the good for evil and vice versa.

“Suppose I do not sincerely love it but instead turn away from it. I would then be regarding good as evil and obscuring my innate faculty which knows the good. When [an evil] thought or wish arises, the innate faculty of my mind already knows it to be evil. If I did not sincerely hate it but instead carried it out, I would be regarding evil as good and obscuring my innate faculty which knows evil. In such cases what is supposed to be knowledge is really ignorance. How then can the will be made sincere?” (Wang, 1985, p. 279, italics added)

Wang’s commentary depicts the moral self, with *liang-chih*’s attendance, as capable of conducting a soliloquy between the true and erring selves, debating over what is right and wrong.

Notwithstanding the internal turmoil waged within, Wang then asserts that *liang-chih* is one’s innate compass for right or wrong.

“Your innate knowledge [*liang-chih*] is your own standard. When you direct your thought your innate knowledge knows that it is right if it is right and wrong if it is wrong.” (Wang, 1985, p. xxxvii)

He also warns against trying to hide from its all-encompassing oversight.

“You cannot keep anything from it. Just do not try to defy it but sincerely and truly follow it in whatever you do.” (Wang, 1985, p. xxxvii)

Wang’s explication depicts *liang-chih*’s role, I submit, as being comparable to the role of conscience commonly understood. It is the human person’s internal self-checking faculty, the voice from within the soul that prods and guides one and keeps one from straying from the path.

In addition to this common understanding, Wang also accorded to *liang-chih* distinctive qualities, including an extraordinary transforming power.

“If people know the true secret of this innate knowledge, no matter how many evil thoughts and wrong desires there may be, as soon as it realizes them they will all disappear of themselves. It is truly a highly effective medicine, one touch of which will turn iron into gold.” (Wang, 1985, p. 194)

Liang-chih's pronouncement is the standard to which everything must conform. And if *liang-chih* is obeyed, Wang declared, the *Tao* will prevail.

“Then the good will be preserved and evil will be removed. What security and joy there is in this! This is the true secret of the investigation of things and the real effort of the extension of knowledge.” (Wang, 1985, p. xxxvii)

To conclude, moral discernment for Wang involves two faculties. The first is the ability to discern moral right or wrong as provided by *hsin* through *chi* and *yi*, directing one to the appropriate *li* and *jen*. The second is the subsequent internal oversight. And while both *hsin* and *liang-chih* are accorded this function of self-introspection, Wang for the most part assigned the primary role to *liang-chih*, whose oversight is presented as all-encompassing and supreme.

D) Framework of Moral Knowledge

Knowledge consists of both practical and conceptual aspects. To this basic classification, Wang adds an important clarification. His formulation of *chih-hsing ho-yi* (unity of knowledge and action) was presented to emphasize the integral relationship between knowledge and action.

“Knowledge in its genuine and earnest aspect is action, and action in its intelligent and discriminating aspect is knowledge.” (Wang, 1985, p. 93)

In Wang's view, knowledge is no mere intellectual exercise; it must be translated into practice. And action likewise is validated only if preceded by thoughtful deliberation.

“At bottom the task of knowledge and action cannot be separated . . . True knowledge is what constitutes action and that unless it is acted on it cannot be called knowledge.” (Wang, 1985, p. 93)

Wang's chief concern was to ensure that knowledge is followed up with action.

Deliberation begins with discernment and is completed only when the acquired knowledge is put into practice. Hence, for Wang it is crucial that equal attention is given to both the acquiring of and the acting upon moral knowledge. Wang's framework of moral knowledge can thus be analyzed in terms of two elements: knowing and doing.

D1) To Know

D1.1) Practical Knowledge

One set of challenges that people face are of the practical genre, i.e., how to respond to everyday exigencies. In Wang's framework, I submit, the knowledge that guides a person in these practical deliberations consists of two types: innate knowledge (*pen chih*) and extended knowledge (*chih-chih*).

a) Innate Knowledge: In his explication of *hsin*, Wang describes the human capability for compassion in the following way.

“[W]hen it perceives a child fallen into a well, it naturally knows that one should be commiserative.” (Wang, 1985, p. 15)

The key element here is the *hsin*'s natural ability to feel for the child. Wang took the extra effort to underscore that this capacity is something inborn.

“This is innate knowledge of good and need not be sought outside” (Wang, 1985, p. 15)

In Wang's view, there are practical discernments, e.g., commiseration for a child in distress, that are innate to human nature. In another exegesis, Wang also indicates that such innate moral insights are not learned.

“This sense of right or wrong is knowledge possessed by men without deliberation and ability possessed by them without their having acquired it by learning.” (Wang, 1985, p. 167)

The claim that there exists innate knowledge that does not require additional consideration, I submit, suggests that Wang regards certain responses as *prima facie* duties. These are moral imperatives that are right (or wrong) in and of themselves without need for further justification, e.g., be compassionate, be truthful, be kind, etc. And finally, according to Wang, these innate discernments and moral imperatives are universal, i.e., they are the natural possession of all people.

“This knowledge is inherent in the human mind whether that of the sage or the stupid person, for it is the same for the whole world and for all ages.” (Wang, 1985, p. 167)

In sum, I submit that Wang believes that each person possesses a set of innate practical knowledge, which corresponds to a set of *prima facie* duties commonly known to all.

b) Extended Knowledge: For Wang, the innate is foundational, yet it is only one part of human knowledge. The inborn acumen needs to be “extended,” hence his notion of *chih-chih* (the extension of knowledge).

“What I mean by . . . the extension of knowledge is to extend the innate knowledge of my mind to each and every thing.” (Wang, 1985, p. 95)

Wang's *chih-chih* is the call to expand one's existing knowledge. This is an exhortation to employ natural knowledge in daily application and to translate the innate general

principles into specific practical responses. In this way, one's moral knowledge will develop and grow. Indeed, Wang is mindful that it is in the extension of knowledge that the moral challenges are most intricate. What is innate is clearly understood and commonly accepted.

“Innate knowledge of the good and innate ability to do good are possible even in men and women of simple intelligence.” (Wang, 1985, p. 107)

It is the application of the inborn knowledge into actual contextual exigencies that presents complex dilemmas.

“As to the minute details and varying circumstances, in which an infinitesimal mistake in the beginning may lead to an infinite error at the end, they need to be studied before we know them.” (Wang, 1985, p. 107)

This leads Wang to the following summation:

“The difficult part of our effort lies entirely in the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge.” (Wang, 1985, p. 55)

For instance, in the case of the distressed child, everybody is capable of showing instinctive concern. The challenge lies in translating these feelings into actionable decisions, i.e., how to save the child? And the actual context often presents a complicated dilemma. For instance, the rescue effort may put the child and the observer's well-being in conflict, e.g., the child has fallen into a very deep well and an attempt to save the child could unduly endanger the observer. In such situations, the predicament is to ascertain whose welfare should prevail, the child's or the observer's? In these practical exigencies, I submit, decisions are made under the guidance of two forms of justification: one based on consequences and the other independent of consequences.³³

³³ For background on these various ethical terms and norms, see Philip Ivanhoe (1991) *Character Consequentialism: An Early Confucian Contribution to Contemporary Ethical Theory*. See also W. D. Ross (1965) *The Right and The Good* (Chapter 2), Paul Taylor (1975) *Principles of Ethics*, and John Reeder (1993) “Three Moral Traditions.”

b1.1) Consequences: For the most part, people decide on a particular course of action based on their ability to assess the probable outcome. And in Wang's framework, I argue, this evaluation of consequences may yield two types of results: more determinate and less determinate.

b1.1.1) More Determinate: In the first instance, there are circumstances where one is able to anticipate with clarity the consequences and discern with certainty the appropriate action.

Let us revisit the case of the distressed child and consider a scenario where the child has fallen into a shallow well. In this case, the observer is able to assess clearly the consequences of his options and reach a determinate decision, i.e., to save the child. The converse is also true. If the child falls into a fast-moving rapid and the observer is a non-swimmer, then he should conclude unambiguously that to try to rescue the child would constitute recklessness.

Wang, I argue, does recognize that there are life situations where people are able to discern clearly the appropriate practical actions. In a short commentary on filial piety, he alludes to such cases.

“The foundations of truth are easy to understand . . . Who does not know that filial piety involves caring for the comfort of parents in both winter and summer and serving and supporting them?” (Wang, 1985, p. 107)

To provide one's parents with basic care is, in Wang's view, one instance where all people ought to know the appropriate compassionate response. For Wang, in these unambiguous circumstances, all people of sound mind would arrive at a common definitive judgment.

b1.1.2) Less Determinate: To be sure, not all life exigencies offer a person such a clear judgment. There are circumstances where what constitutes right or wrong is encumbered with ambiguity.

For instance, let's say the child falls into a river and the observer is a fair swimmer but with a heart ailment. How should he react to the exigency? Should he risk his life to save the child or should he preserve himself? In these complex circumstances, the contextual factors afford no unambiguous decision. The eventual judgment is inevitably based on a less determinate assessment of the consequences. The observer may decide to save the child based on a perceived high, albeit estimated, possibility of success. Conversely, he could choose to protect himself if in his judgment the possibility of success is low. In either case, the decision is based on *probable* consequences. His pronouncement is not absolute and he is not entirely free of doubt. Wang, I argue, is mindful that some decisions are made based on judgments that are less than determinate. One simply has to decide without the benefit of unqualified certainty. Wang alludes to such tentativeness in another brief discussion on the child in the well, elaborating on how best to save the child.

“Perhaps one cannot follow the child into the well to rescue it. Perhaps one can rescue by seizing it with the hand.” (Wang, 1985, p. 109)

Wang's remarks bear the recognition of the complexity and ambivalence that mar some moral challenges. He is mindful that in these more intricate exigencies the appropriate reactions are not readily discernable.

b1.2) Regardless of Consequences: While most decisions are guided by an evaluation of consequences, there are specific cases when a person is moved to take a course of action regardless of consequences.

Let's reconsider the case of a child fallen into a rapid where the observer is a swimmer but with a heart ailment. In one scenario, the observer, upon initial deliberation, decides against any rescue attempt, judging the risk as unacceptably high. Yet he may later be prodded to discard this consequence-guided decision. He is moved to respond even if the possibility of success is low. In this instance, he is driven by a sense of duty to act, regardless of the probable consequences, i.e., the high failure rate. Such cases represent exceptional exigencies of the less determinate genre. A person, upon reaching a conclusion guided by probable consequences may subsequently be compelled to take a contrary, deontological decision. Wang, I argue, does recognize such instances when one is bound to act without the benefit of knowing the consequences. The sage, Wang says, is not dependent on foreknowledge.

“The sage is the one who is in the state of sincerity, spirit, and incipient activating force. The sage does not value foreknowledge.” (Wang, 1985, p. 225)

Wang explains that there are life circumstances when the sage may be embattled by adversities. And while engulfed in moments of tribulation, when one appears to be at wit's end as to what to do, the sage, according to Wang, “simply knows” the right (or wrong) response.

“When blessings and calamities come, even a sage cannot avoid them. He only knows the incipient activating force of things and handles it in accordance with the circumstance.” (Wang, 1985, p. 225)

And this instant discernment, Wang says, is a sort of perception apt for that moment, independent of past or future considerations, i.e., consequences notwithstanding.

“To innate knowledge there is neither the past nor the future. It knows only the incipient activating force of the present moment, and once this succeeds everything else will succeed.” (Wang, 1985, p. 225)

I submit that Wang recognizes that there are indeed cases when a person is moved by the activating force and rightness of a decision to take a course of action regardless of the consequences.

In summation, the quest for practical discernment is guided first by a set of innate knowledge presented as general rules and prima facie duties, e.g., do not lie, do not kill, etc. One then applies these principles to discern the specific action in particular cases, and this process can produce three types of outcomes. Two are consequence based: one involves decisions arrived more determinately and the other entails decisions reached less determinately. The third is of the deontological type where judgments are made regardless of consequences.

D1.2) Conceptual Knowledge

Beyond the practical, people also encounter challenges of the conceptual genre, e.g., what is the *Tien Li*? In Wang’s framework, the knowledge that guides a person to conceptual discernment likewise consists of two types: innate knowledge (*pen chih*) and extended knowledge (*chih-chih*).

a) Innate Knowledge: A person’s innate knowledge consists of both practical and conceptual discernments. Just as one is born with instinctive compassion for a distressed child, similarly all people possess a certain innate conceptual understanding of nature. Wang seems to assume that awareness of *Tien* is one subject readily known to all people.

“Exerting the mind to the utmost, knowing one’s nature, and knowing *Tien* are matters known from birth and are practiced naturally and easily.” (Wang, 1985, p. 46)

Such knowledge is possessed by all naturally. It is not externally acquired and requires no additional effort, i.e., study. Wang, I thus submit, believes that people are born with sets of conceptual comprehension.

b) Extended Knowledge: Inborn knowledge, while foundational, does not describe fully the natural order. What is known innately represents only a partial view and needs to be supplemented, i.e., extended. Wang’s treatment of *Tien Li* is a case in point. For Wang, *Tien Li*’s existence is a given but human understanding of it is incomplete.

“Now since we do not yet know all about *Tien Li* . . . how can we exert any effort on self mastery?” (Wang, 1985, p. 46)

Wang’s implication is that *Tien Li*’s specific function and characteristics remain a subject for further inquiry.

Wang also alludes to the need for *chih-chih* in a commentary on ritual practices. Humankind is born with basic comprehension of what constitutes the proper names and ceremonies of rituals. However, these, Wang continues, are general in form.

“What is known at birth is moral principle only.” (Wang, 1985, p. 17)

Therefore, the application of these principles to specific circumstances calls for further development.

“As to the changing events of past and present, and the names and varieties of ceremonies and music, they surely require study before their validity can be verified in practice.” (Wang, 1985, p. 17)

The need for additional study, i.e., to extend innate conceptual knowledge, is not lost on Wang. And to be sure the conceptual *chih-chih*, as with its practical counterpart, presents considerable challenges.

In these conceptual explorations, I submit, discernments are guided by the evaluation of evidence. And this assessment may similarly yield two types of results: more definitive and less definitive evidence.

b1) More Definitive: In the first instance, there are subjects where one is able to verify particular veracity with more definitive evidence. In Wang's view, for instance, the human capacity to act benevolently independent of self-interest is supported by definitive evidence. Wang's confidence is reflected in his unswerving refutation of the Mohist counterclaims. Here is how he recounted and seconded Mencius's denunciation of Mo Tzu.

“Mencius exposed the fallacies of Yang Chu and Mo Tzu to the point of condemning them for not recognizing the father or the ruler . . . their harmful effort that had developed was such that Mencius compared these men to beasts and barbarians. It was because they did what is called destroying later generations by means of learning.” (Wang, 1985, p. 163)

For Wang, there are conceptual controversies that can be resolved with certainty, where all people can and ought to reach a common comprehension with clarity.

b2) Less Definitive: To be sure, not all controversies are resolved in an assured way. There are situations where choices are supported by evidence that is less than certain. In a general discussion on the transmission of correct teachings, Wang suggests that at times one simply has to proceed based on an estimation, i.e., less than exact evidence. He pointed to Confucius as the model for this.

“One should only follow the example of Confucius, by recording those that are approximately correct and making them known. The various perverse doctrines will then gradually disappear themselves.” (Wang, 1985, p. 15)

For Wang, some teachings can be presented with confidence, while others may have to be transmitted with tentativeness, relying on “approximation.” And in a more specific discussion on the general understanding of nature, Wang also warns against holding one’s view too dogmatically. Wang began by conceding that the debate on nature could take on a less than certain trajectory.

“The discussion of nature also has no definitive form.” (Wang, 1985, p. 15)

He then explains that this is because people do approach the subject matter from different perspectives.

“Some discussed it from the point of view of its original substance, some from the point of view of its emanation and functioning, some from the point of view of its source, and some from the point of view of the defects that may develop in the course of its operation.” (Wang, 1985, p. 15)

While the opinions put forth are diverse, Wang adds that people are really talking about the same things.

“Collectively, they talked about this one nature, but their depth of understanding it varied, that is all.” (Wang, 1985, p. 15)

In light of people’s biases or partial point of views, therefore, Wang cautions against holding these views too inflexibly.

“If one holds rigidly to one aspect as they did it would be a mistake.” (Wang, 1985, p. 15)

In summation, people’s quest for conceptual understanding is first informed by a set of innate knowledge. Beyond this, one then pursues further comprehension and this could yield two types of results: one involving beliefs asserted with the benefit of more definitive evidence and the other affirmed based on less definitive proofs.

D2) To Do

In the *chih-hsing ho-yi* formulation, Wang underscored the need to follow through on the acquired knowledge with action. Wang's concern to match theory with practice, I argue, may be described in terms of two components: the external act and the internal motivation.

D2.1) External Acts

The most apparent moral lapses are those associated with the external form, i.e., failure to act (inaction) and or failure to perform the correct act (committing the wrong deed). Let's revisit the scenario of the child fallen into a rapid where the observer is a fair swimmer. In the first instance, in spite of considerable risks the person may be compelled by compassion and empowered by courage to undertake the dangerous rescue. Then in a sudden reversal, perhaps due to a succumbing to fear, the person wavers and aborts the plan. In this case he knows his earlier judgment is right but he failed to garner the motivation to act. Thus he neglected to do what he knows ought to be done. For Wang, the problem of inaction is considerable, i.e., people knowing the right yet failing to act on it. Knowing is the beginning and perhaps the easier task. It is acting on what one knows that is the more difficult hurdle to cross.

“The innate faculty naturally knows, which is in fact easy. But often one cannot extend his innate knowledge to the utmost. This shows that it is not difficult to know but difficult to act.” (Wang, 1985, p. 250)

In a separate analysis, Wang framed this lapse in the more general form of people's failure to match their study with practice.

“People today distinguish between knowledge and action and pursue them separately, believing that one must know before he can act . . . They say that [they will wait] till they truly know before putting their knowledge into practice.

Consequently, to the end of their lives, they will never act and also will never know.” (Wang, 1985, p. 11)

Thus, for Wang a serious moral malaise results when people fail to follow through on their speech with action or when they have become committed to study without putting the knowledge acquired into practice.

D2.2) Internal Motivation

A subtler form of failure for Wang is associated with the “spirit” of one’s action. A person may act without the proper motivation, i.e., one may perform the right deed yet do so insincerely. For example, all able-bodied persons would act to save a child fallen into a shallow well. Nevertheless, people could do so for various reasons and with motivations other than a genuine concern for the child. A person may perform the external act with a less noble impetus, e.g., to satisfy one’s ego. For the Confucian, the primary motive for one’s action ought to be empathetic concern for the child. To be driven by anything other than this genuine compassion is to have committed an insincere act. Wang provides the following diagnosis of such inferior exterior actions.

“Outwardly people make pretense in the name of humanity and righteousness. At heart their real aim is to act for their own benefit.” (Wang, 1985, p. 168)

In another analysis, he framed the problem in terms of people’s failure to match *li* (rituals) with *hsin* (understood here as spirit).

“There are people who only strive to make their actions look good on the outside, while separating them completely from *hsin*. They make *hsin* and *li* into two things, drifting unconsciously into hypocrisy as did the [Five] Despots.” (Wang, 1985, p. 252)

For Wang there are indeed acts that appear to achieve a certain external good, e.g., saving the child, yet can be exposed as hypocritical. Wang then equated such artificiality with

the staged performances of an actor, an external display with no meaningful internal significance.

“If the highest good means no more than having the details correct, then dressing like an actor and acting out these details correctly on the stage would be called the highest good.” (Wang, 1985, p. 9)

For Wang insincere acts are deceptive, concealed moral failures, more pervasive and difficult to check. And they have an insidious corroding effect that over time can erode a person’s moral capability and development.³⁴

In sum, Wang’s priority is to make sure people do act on what they know is right and in this regard Wang’s concern can be interpreted as taking two forms. The first is to ensure that people do indeed perform the correct external act and the second is to make certain people do act with the proper internal motivation.

E) Moral Objectivity and Diversity

In Wang’s framework, decision-making is guided by innate and extended knowledge. And in these deliberations there are some cases that offer more determinate conclusions while others afford less definitive conclusions. In the latter case, where decisions are made with tentativeness, people inevitably arrive at diverse and contentious opinions. For instance, while *Tien* is affirmed, people do hold conflicting views on the transcendent’s specific characteristics. The reality of such disparate outlooks posits the objectivity question: how does one referee impartially these divisive points of views? Does the human order possess a singular standard to evaluate the diverse opinions?

³⁴ Tu Wei-Ming’s *Humanity and Self-Cultivation* (1990) presents an extensive analysis of the dialectic between *li* and *jen*, external form and internal spirit, illuminating the Confucian concern to set the outer action’s inner motivation in the right spirit.

E1) Objective Order

Wang's Confucian tradition, I plan to show, presupposes a unified order, where judgments are assumed to be made with reference to an objective benchmark. The overarching theme that runs through Wang's writings, as with the Confucian tradition in general, is the vision of oneness. In a commentary on the *Ta Ren* (great man), Wang describes the noble person as attaining harmony with all things.

“The great man regards Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body. He regards the world as one family and the country as one person.” (Wang, 1985, p. 272)

Wang then explains that the great man is able to achieve the unified state as this is nature's intent.

“That the great man can regard Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body is not because he deliberately wants to do so, but because it is natural to the humane nature of his mind that he does so.” (Wang, 1985, p. 272)

Wang's emphasis is to underline nature's design for all things to attain unity. And to achieve this goal Wang asserts that an order has been set in nature to guide one towards the *Tao*. In an exegesis on the *Ta Hsueh*, Wang alludes to such an order.

“What the *Ta Hsueh* calls relative importance means that according to innate knowledge there is a natural order which should not be skipped over.” (Wang, 1985, p. 223)

And this natural order, Wang explains, contains codes guiding human moral conduct.

“To follow this [natural] order is called propriety. To understand this order is called wisdom. And to follow this order from beginning to end is called faithfulness.” (Wang, 1985, p. 223)

The natural order, in Wang's view, has indeed laid out ethical and moral expectations for human behavior.

The linkage of human norms to the natural order has led to the discussion of whether the Confucian tradition posits something equivalent to the Western notion of natural law. Wang's language and usage of imageries, I argue, strongly suggest the assumption of the existence of a law of nature. Here is one such pronouncement.

“It is a general law in the universe that when it gets dark, things rest. As night falls, heaven and earth become an undifferentiated state. Forms and colors all disappear.” (Wang, 1985, p. 219)

In the first instance, this law is described as governing the cosmic and physical orders. Wang then contrasts the working of the celestial realm with the human form and their corresponding moral functions.

“As heaven and earth open up again, all the myriad things reveal themselves and grow. With man also, the ear and eye now sees and hears, and all apertures are open. This is the time when the wonderful functioning of *liang-chih* starts.” (Wang, 1985, p. 219)

Wang's insinuation is that there is one encompassing set of laws governing the cosmic and human orders. He then concludes that it is this law in nature that enables all things to become one.

“From this we can see that the human mind and heaven and earth form one body. Therefore ‘It forms the same current above and below with that of heaven and earth.’” (Wang, 1985, p. 219)

Modern scholarship has generally recognized the Confucian familiarity with the language, if not the direct affirmation, of natural law. Nevertheless, contentions remain over the interpretation of these laws, specifically, whether or not they consist of moral imperatives of the timeless and contextless genre.

To be sure, this subject is disputed among natural law theorists in general. And within the Confucian studies discipline, this contention has divided scholars into two camps. Thinkers who affirm the thesis of timeless, contextless imperatives include Joseph

Needham and Randall Preenboom.³⁵ And those who take the opposing stance include David Hall and Roger Ames, who argue that the Confucians held a more contextual and organic view of moral order.³⁶ The Confucian traditions, I plan to argue, do affirm a natural law theory that assumes the existence of timeless and contextless norms. To support this claim, I will present two sets of arguments.

Wang elevated *liang-chih* as a person's supreme guide. In one exegesis, he compares *liang-chih*'s function to that of a compass and square.

“*Liang-chih* is to minute details and varying circumstances as compass and measures are to areas and lengths.” (Wang, 1985, p. 109)

Just as a compass and square would expose any deception in empirical measurements, *liang-chih* similarly acts to reveal any attempts at falsehood.

“If compass and squares are truly set, there cannot be any deception regarding areas, and the possibility of correct areas in the world cannot be exhausted . . . If *liang-chih* is truly extended, there cannot be any deception regarding minute details and varying circumstances, and the possibility of minute details and varying circumstances in the world cannot be exhausted.” (Wang, 1985, p. 109)

This comparison of *liang-chih* with a compass and square is significant. Just as there are fixed empirical measurements of shapes and length, likewise with *liang-chih*, Wang argues, there are constant standards of right and wrong in the realm of moral judgments. By likening *liang-chih* to a compass and square, Wang, I argue, affirms the existence of an objective norm, with fixed standards that are universal and constant, i.e., timeless and contextless.

³⁵ See Joseph Needham's "Human Law and the Law of Nature in China and the West" (1951) and Randall Preenboom's "Law and Morality in Ancient China: the Silk Manuscript of Huang Lao" (1993).

³⁶ See David Hall and Roger Ames' *Thinking Through Confucius* (1987), *Anticipating China* (1995), and *Thinking from the Han* (1998).

The second set of arguments is drawn from the Confucianist Lu Chiu-Yuan's exposé on the Sages.

“Sages appeared tens of thousands of generations ago. They shared this *hsin*; they shared this *li*.” (Lu Chiu-Yuan, quoted in Chan, 1963, p. 580)

Since time immemorial, there have been Sages and they all possess a common *hsin* and *li*.

Lu then asserts that these Sages' *hsin* and *li* are enduringly the same, ten thousand generations into the past and ten thousand generations into the future.

“Sages will appear tens of thousands of generations to come. They will share this *hsin*; they will share this *li*.” (Lu Chiu-Yuan, quoted in Chan, 1963, p. 580)

The point of these hyperboles is to emphasize the timelessness of *hsin* and *li*, i.e., they are present at all times. Lu then added that the Sages' moral faculties and acumen also extend across geographical space.

“Sages appear over the Four Seas. They share this *hsin*; they share this *li*.” (Lu Chiu-Yuan, quoted in Chan, 1963, p. 580)

Thus, for Lu *hsin* and *li* are also contextless, valid in all places regardless of location.

In sum, I submit that Wang and the Confucians in general do recognize the existence of an objective norm and an equivalent notion of natural law. And they regard these laws as sets of *prima facie* duties, regarded as timeless, contextless values.

E2) Conceptual Knowledge

Wang's vision assumes an objective order upon which judgments are made. Nevertheless, reality is full of contentious disputes over the contents of these objective norms. The discourse over right or wrong is often marred by apparently intractable subjective claims and counterclaims. For example, while the *Ta Hsueh* is affirmed,

disagreements persist over the sequencing of its four steps. How does Wang reconcile the vision of a singular order with the reality of conflicting diverse opinions?

*E2.1) The Two-Tiered Order*³⁷

Wang's strategy, I argue, is to approach the challenge with a two-tiered, primary and secondary, framework.

E2.1.1) Primary and Secondary Orders

The **primary order** consists of norms considered to be foundational, i.e., doctrines that form the core of the moral tradition. These are derived from the more definitive conceptual subjects where all people are assumed to possess a clear comprehension. For example, the notion of human innate moral potential is a belief that Wang regard as fundamental and he expected all sound-minded people to affirm this doctrine.

The primary order is then maintained firmly. People's conceptual views must conform to these norms. Failure to do so would incur strict censure. For example, the Mohists' thesis denying the human capacity for benevolence constituted, in Wang's view, one such violation. And Wang shows no toleration for such errors, censuring the Mohists accordingly.

The **secondary order** consists of norms regarded as supplementary, i.e., doctrines that serve as the supporting edifice of the moral tradition. These are drawn from the less definitive conceptual subjects where people's comprehension is inevitably vexed with

ambivalence. For example, with regard to the *Ta Hsueh's* four cultivation steps, Wang concedes that there is no definitive interpretation of their sequencing. He accepts that people may indeed have different opinions on how these steps are organized.

The secondary order is then maintained with tentativeness. People's conceptual views are not expected to conform strictly to the secondary norms. Wang would accommodate diverse assertions, even erroneous ones, if made in good conscience. For example, Chu Hsi ordered the *Ta Hsueh's* four steps differently from Wang. Though early criticisms were aired, Wang subsequently tolerated Chu Hsi's contrary position. In these indeterminate cases, Wang concedes that people may sincerely differ. He would render toned-down judgments (e.g., labeling something as morally wrong but blameless) and accommodate diversity, acknowledging that people can conscientiously disagree.

E2.1.2) Maintaining Objectivity in Diversity

In the secondary order, Wang allows space for divergence, even tolerating views contradicting his own. Wang's inclusiveness raises a concern: does accommodation of secondary moral wrongs compromise the objective order? There is no question that toleration of diverse opinions is a concession to subjectivism. At the secondary order, people are permitted to assert their respective views with impunity. This is granted because there is no objective standard to referee the divergent assertions. Hence a degree of relativism is conceded as people impose their subjective opinions. Nevertheless, this is not a surrendering to extreme relativism. A person's freedom to express his or her

³⁷ Sumner Twiss first introduced these two categories into Confucian studies in his 1997 article "A Constructive Framework for Discussing Confucianism and Human Rights," published in de Bary and Tu (ed.) *Confucianism and Human Rights* (1997).

subjective views has limits. The primary order sets the outer boundaries which a person's opinions cannot transgress. People may disagree on the secondary norms but are not allowed to violate the primary order. For example, some of the specifics of moral cultivation are considered as secondary norms. And disputes over these particulars are generally tolerated, as is the case with Wang's disagreement with Chu Hsi on the *Ta Hsueh's* four steps. While scholars may tolerate discord over certain specifics, there are core principles where there is no room for compromise. The doctrine of human innate moral capability is one such primary norm and teachings that contradict this are censured, as was the case with Wang's condemnation of the Mohists. Hence while a person may have diverse (and even erroneous) subjective opinions on the specifics of moral cultivation, they are not allowed to contradict the primary norms, in this instance the doctrine of human moral potential. In sum, Wang approaches the challenge of diversity by positing a two-tiered order. At its foundation are the primary norms derived from teachings that humans ought to know. On this base is placed the secondary norms drawn from the less determinate conceptual knowledge. This framework enables Wang to respond discriminately to moral diversity, enforcing strict compliance on the primary norms while accommodating differences in the secondary norms. The differentiated responses, I submit, allow Wang to tolerate diverse and even erroneous views without succumbing to extreme relativism.

E2.2) Basis for Primary and Secondary Orders

The two-tiered order is the key in Wang's strategy of reconciling diversity without compromising objectivity. I now present four sets of arguments to substantiate the thesis that Wang's order is based on this framework of the primary and the secondary.

E2.2.1) Wang's Commentary on Confucius

In one teacher-student exchange, Wang explained Confucius' view of knowledge. He began by drawing on Mencius to clarify one of Confucius' pronouncements.

“Confucius once said, ‘There are those who act without knowing [what is right]. But I am not one of them.’ This has the same idea as the saying of Mencius, ‘The feeling of right and wrong is found in all men.’ It was intended precisely to show that innate moral knowledge of our moral nature does not come from hearing and seeing.” (Wang, 1985, p. 111)

Wang's point is to underscore the classical Confucian doctrine of innate knowledge, i.e., people possess inborn comprehension. He then elaborates that this innate knowledge needs to be extended through hearing and learning. And he adds that Confucius regarded this subsequent learning as secondary.

“When Confucius continued to say, ‘Hear much and select what is good and follow it. See much and remember it,’ he referred to nothing but seeking solely after the *secondary* matters of seeing and hearing, thus already falling to the *secondary* level. This is why Confucius said [in conclusion], ‘This is *secondary* knowledge.’” (Wang, 1985, p. 111, italics added)

In this commentary Wang interprets Confucius as recognizing a class of secondary knowledge and thus by implication the existence of a primary order. Wang then asked, rhetorically, what is the higher or primary knowledge.

“Since he regarded knowledge from hearing and seeing as *secondary*, what then is *higher* knowledge? Here you can have a peep at the place where the Confucian school directs its efforts at the extension of knowledge.” (Wang, 1985, p. 111, italics added)

Wang's exegesis shows a discrimination of knowledge into higher, i.e., innate, and secondary, i.e., acquired, genres. The usage of “higher” and “secondary,” I submit, is

equivalent to the two-tiered primary and secondary order. The former represents innate knowledge that all people already know and the latter points to what is acquired through subsequent “seeing and hearing.”

E2.2.2) Wang’s Statement on Relative Importance

The implicit two-tiered order is also discernable in Wang’s diagnoses of moral challenges. His evaluation of moral quandaries reflects the employment of a sliding scale of severity. This leads him to issue remedial reactions that correspond to the various degrees of seriousness. To begin, Wang explains that *liang-chih*’s presence is all encompassing.

“There is only one innate knowledge. In its manifestation and universal operation, it is then and there self-sufficient. It comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. It depends on nothing.” (Wang, 1985, p. 177)

He then elaborates that *liang-chih* in its operation does take into account the variation in difficulties that different exigencies present, i.e., some situations are more critical than others.

“However, in its manifestation and universal operation, there are degrees of importance and intensity to and from which not the slightest amount can be added or subtracted.” (Wang, 1985, p. 177)

In a separate exegesis, Wang reiterated *liang-chih*’s pristine moral dictates.

“As the highest good emanates and reveals itself, we will consider right as right and wrong as wrong.” (Wang, 1985, p. 274)

He adds that people will be guided to respond appropriately to the challenges presented to them according to the challenges’ varying gravity.

“Things of greater or less importance and situations of grave or light character will be responded to as they act upon us.” (Wang, 1985, p. 274)

In these statements, Wang acknowledges that good and evil, right and wrong, can be of diverse intensities. And he recognized the need for discriminated responses in accord with their relative seriousness. The primary and secondary norms, I submit, comprise one form by which the different degrees and types of moral challenges can be accounted for and categorized.

E2.2.3) Wang's Differentiated Reactions to Moral Challenges

Wang's appeal for discriminated responses is evidenced by his own nuanced reactions to the challenges posed by the Mohists, Chu Hsi, and Buddhism. For starters, Wang's criticism of the Buddhists is well known.

“In the past there have, of course, been people who wanted to manifest their clear character. But simply because they did not know how to abide by the highest good, but instead drove their own minds towards something too lofty, they thereby lost themselves in illusions, emptiness, and quietness, having nothing to do with the work of the family, the state, and the world. Such are the followers of Buddhism.” (Wang, 1985, p. 274-275)

He was also critical of the despotic Imperial courts, influenced in particular by the Mohists' doctrine of profit and success, which unduly corrupted the ruling class.

“Rulers of the time were also fooled and confounded by those doctrines and devoted their whole lives to useless superficialities without knowing what they meant. Occasionally some rulers realized the emptiness, falsehood, fragmentariness, and unnaturalness of their ways, and heroically roused themselves to great effort, which they wished to demonstrate in concrete action. But the most they could do was no more than to achieve national wealth . . . such as those of the Five Despots.” (Wang, 1985, p. 122)

While disapproving of both the Buddhists and the Mohists, Wang's arguments indicate a harsher tone toward the latter.

“They [Mohists] mutilated it and lost its true nature . . . People of these four schools work hard throughout their lives and benefit their bodies and minds not a bit. They seem to compare unfavorably with the Buddhists and Taoists.” (Wang, 1985, p. 41)

In this comparative analysis, Wang pronounces a more serious judgment upon the Mohists vis-à-vis the Buddhists. And in another analysis, this time contrasting the Buddhists with the Confucians, Wang placed the comparison in a two-tiered framework. To be sure, in Wang's view, Buddhism is not without shortcomings. Yet vis-à-vis the Confucians, the Buddhist order is not entirely flawed. As a matter of fact, Wang says, the Buddhists and Confucians share some essential similarities.

“Reduced to the fundamentals, the Buddhists . . . are somewhat similar to the Confucians.” (Wang, 1985, p. 41)

Nevertheless, there are some differences. For instance, Wang described a particular Buddhist deficiency as follows:

“However they have only the upper section and neglect the lower section, and in the end are not as perfect as the Sage.” (Wang, 1985, p. 41)

Wang then seeks to tone down his criticism of the Buddhists.

“Nevertheless we cannot deny that they are similar in the upper section.” (Wang, 1985, p. 41)

Wang's usage of the upper and lower sections is instructive. It suggests the recognition of a differentiated order, akin to the primary and secondary norms introduced in this dissertation.

Wang's reactions to his moral opponents, i.e., the Buddhists and Mohists, I submit, reflects a two-tiered order. The Mohists are regarded as having violated the primary order and thus incur a more severe rebuke. But the Buddhists are deemed to have violated the secondary order and hence drew a milder reaction.

E2.2.4) Wang's Overall View on Pluralism

Wang's general response to moral pluralism, i.e., the diverse traditions present during the Ming era, is one of inclusiveness. While the *Tao* is a singular goal, Wang declared, there is a plurality of paths.

“In the world there are many different roads but the destination is the same. There are a hundred deliberations but the result is one.” (Wang, 1985, p. 126)

This doctrine of multiple ways, I argue, also broadly supports the primary and secondary norms thesis. In a commentary on the seemingly diverse opinions dispensed by the sages, Wang has this to say.

“How could these sages be confined to a rigid pattern? So long as they all sincerely proceeded from innate knowledge, what harm is there in each one's explaining his own way?” (Wang, 1985, p. 230)

In Wang's view, as long as people do not violate the innate knowledge, they are at liberty to articulate their respective points of view. Wang then uses an agricultural metaphor to press the point.

“Take for example a garden of bamboos. So long as they all have branches and joints, they are similar in general. If it were rigidly insisted upon that each and every branch or joint had to be of the same size or height, that would not be the wonderful handiwork of creation.” (Wang, 1985, p. 230)

It is clear that for Wang there is a need to recognize and accommodate diversity. And he warns against being too dogmatic in assuming only a singular path. Wang exhorts people to focus on their respective tasks, which may be diverse, and not be distracted by their differences, as long as they are united on the core values.

“You people should just go ahead and cultivate innate knowledge. If all have the same innate knowledge, there is no harm in their being different here and there. But if you are not willing to exert effort, you don't even sprout. What branches or joints are there to talk about?” (Wang, 1985, p. 230)

Wang's exhortation to diversity and his simultaneous assertion of the need to maintain innate knowledge, I argue, clearly imply a two-tiered order, i.e., the primary and the

secondary. Thus, for Wang, as long as the primary norms are secured, there may indeed be a multiplicity of paths that lead to the *Tao*.

I conclude that the preceding four sets of arguments do support the thesis that when confronted with the challenges of diversity, Wang operated with an implied framework of primary and secondary orders that enabled him to tolerate plurality without compromising the objective order.

E3) Practical Knowledge

The reality of diversity also posits concerns about objectivity at the practical level. For example, in the complex situation of a child fallen into a rapid where the observer is a non-swimmer, discerning the correct reaction is something that is inevitably marred by ambiguity. People will advance contentious opinions on what ought to be the right response.

E3.1) Two-Tiered Order

As with the conceptual order, Wang's strategy, I argue, is to approach the practical challenges with a framework of primary and secondary orders.

E3.1.1) Primary and Secondary Orders

The **primary order** consists of norms considered to be foundational, i.e., values that are the core of a moral tradition. These are derived from the more definitive exigencies where all people are assumed to possess a clear perception of right or wrong. For example, a child falls into a shallow well and the observer is an able-bodied person.

In this case the person ought to act to save the distressed child. For Wang, the imperative to rescue the child in such a determinate situation is fundamental and he expects all sound-minded persons to affirm this universal duty.

Wang would then maintain firmly the primary order. People's practical values must conform to these norms and failure to do so would incur strict censure. For example, due to racial prejudices, the observer may simply refuse to rescue the child. In such an instance, Wang's indictment is resolute; such a failure would be deemed a moral wrong and the response would be to condemn such an action, or inaction.

The *secondary order* consists of norms regarded as supplementary, i.e., values that represent the supporting edifice of a moral tradition. These are drawn from exigencies where people are unable to have absolute certainty about the correct reaction. For example, in the case of a fair swimmer and a drowning child in a rapid, should he or she save the child? In such cases, the decision reached is inevitably inconclusive. In either option, to save or not to save, there remain some elements of doubt. In these situations, Wang concedes that there is no definitive answer. He accepts that there is no unified response and people have to contextually ascertain the best possible reaction.

Wang would then maintain, albeit with tentativeness, the secondary order. People's values are not required to conform fully to these norms. Wang would accommodate diverse opinions, even erroneous ones, if made in good conscience. For example, a person decides not to rescue a child fallen into a rapid, judging the risk to be too high. Wang may indeed dispute the person's judgment, deeming it as timid. Yet he accepts that in such less determinate cases, reasonable people may sincerely disagree. He

would thus render a toned-down verdict, ruling the error as morally wrong but blameless, and recognize that people may conscientiously disagree on what is right or wrong.

E3.2) Exception to the Rule Cases

A phenomenon in the practical realm that captured Wang's attention is exigencies that call for out of the norm responses, i.e., exception to the rule cases.

E3.2.1) Overview

Wang's vision assumes the existence of universal norms governing human conduct. In the first instance, these are expressed as general principles, e.g., be truthful, compassionate, impartial, etc. People's specific practical decisions are then made with reference to these rules. In the main, these hold as the guide to realize the good; for example, a person responds compassionately to save a distressed child. While the general principles serve as the basic guidelines for human conduct and are valid at most times, Wang recognized that there are situations that call for exceptions, i.e., when the rules are suspended temporarily. The recognition of the need for exception is first registered in Wang's pronouncement that change is part of *Tien Li's* essence.

“The mean is nothing but *Tien Li*, it is the Change. It changes according to time.”
(Wang, 1985, p. 43)

With change as a feature of *Tien Li's* mode of operation, Wang cautioned against boxing *Tien Li* into a rigid formula.

“How can one hold it fast? One must act according to circumstance. It is difficult to fix a pattern of action in advance.” (Wang, 1985, p. 43)

In another of his exposés on *liang-chih*, Wang repeated the call to be attentive to variations.

“*Liang-chih* is the same as changes. As the Way, it changes frequently. It changes and moves without staying in one place, flowing about into any one of the six places of the hexagram. It ascends and descends without any constancy, and its elements of strength (yang) and weakness (ying) interchange. It cannot be considered as an invariable standard. It changes to suit the circumstances.” (Wang, 1985, p. 260)

Wang’s general call to be sensitive to changes and to refrain from fixing rigid patterns of thought and behavior is in essence, I argue, a call to recognize anomalies, the out of the norm exigencies. To be sure, human conduct is in the main ordered around a set of norms, yet the contingencies of life demand that one be prepared, at times, to act outside of the box. Not all of life’s challenges can be resolved by adhering to established rules. There are exceptional situations when the good can be attained only by contravening certain conventional norms.

E3.2.2) Case Study

Filial piety is one virtue that underpins the Confucian vision of harmonious co-existence. Over time, the Confucian tradition has compiled a litany of filial duties to govern the father-son relationship, e.g., the need to consult the father on major decisions, the imperative to attend one’s father’s burial, etc. These are strict codes of conduct and assumed operational force in standard familial interaction. Nevertheless, Wang did not treat these codes as being cast in stone and rejected rigid enforcement. While there are general norms governing how one ought to render one’s filial obligations, Wang argued that there are contextual nuances that call for unprecedented forms of response. In the following extended commentary on the father and son relationship, Wang held up various historical examples of out of the norm exigencies that called for extraordinary responses.

“But in such cases as Emperor Shun’s getting married without first telling his parents, King Wu’s launching a military expedition before burying his father, Tseng Tzu’s nourishing the will of his father while his son nourished his mouth

and body, Tseng Tzu's bearing his father's heavy beating or light beating without complaint, a filial son's cutting his own thigh to make medicine for his sick parent, and the crown prince of Teng building by the grave a shed in which to mourn his father, *the question of what to do under normal conditions or under emergency, and what is too much or not enough, must be deliberated with reference to right and wrong so as to provide a basis for handling affairs in the proper way.* Only then can the substance of the mind be free from obscurity and one's will not be at a loss when things happen." (Wang, 1985, p. 107-108, italics added)

While conventions are important for Wang, those seeking to ascertain the appropriate filial acts need to be sensitive to contextual variations as there are circumstances in life when one is required to act out of the norm. Wang then explain that these unconventional reactions are by no means inconsistent with innate knowledge. These historical exemplars, according to Wang, have acted based on their innate knowledge's guidance.

"As for Shun's marrying without first telling his parents, was there someone before him who did the same thing and served as an example for him, which he could find out by looking into certain records and asking certain people, after which he did as he did? Or did he search into the innate knowledge in an instant of thought in his own mind and weigh all factors as to what was proper, after which he could not help doing what he did? Similarly, in the case of King Wu's launching a military expedition before burying his father, was there someone before him who did the same thing and served as an example for him, which he could find out by looking into certain records or asking certain people, after which he did as he did? Or did he search the innate knowledge in an instant of thought in his own mind and weigh all the factors as to what was proper, after which he could not help doing what he did? If Emperor Shun's mind was not sincere about having posterity, and King Wu's mind was not sincere about saving the people, then the former's marrying without first telling his parents and the latter's expedition without first burying his father would be cases of the greatest filial impiety and disloyalty." (Wang, 1985, p. 110)

To be sure, the appeal for exceptional considerations is one that predates Wang. In the paradigmatic case of a man's anguish over his sister-in-law's fall into a well, Mencius called for the suspension of the prevailing protocol. Here is how the challenge is recounted by Mencius:

"Shun-yu Kwan said, 'Is it the rule that males and females shall not allow their hands to touch in giving or receiving anything?' Mencius replied, 'It is the rule'. Kwan asked, 'If a man's sister-in-law be drowning, shall he rescue her with his hand?' Mencius said, 'He who would not so rescue the drowning woman is a

wolf. For males and females not to allow their hands to touch in giving and receiving is the general rule; when a sister-in-law is drowning, to rescue her with the hand is a peculiar exigency.’” (Mencius, D. C. Lau, 1970, p. 145)

Under “normal” circumstances, Confucian decorum forbids improper physical contact between the sexes, particularly that between a man and his sister-in-law. Yet in out of the ordinary life and death exigencies, the sanctity of the sister-in-law’s life, for Mencius, overrides the normal etiquette and a man would be expected to act to save his sister-in-law. To fail to do so is to become bound to a dogmatic and rigid *li* (outer rituals) without the transforming power of *jen* (inner spirit).

E3.2.3) Primary and Secondary Orders

While the need for exceptions is generally recognized, there is less agreement on *when* a suspension of the rules is justified. When is a lie appropriate? As with practical challenges in general, people give contentious judgments on when exceptions are warranted. Wang’s strategy in dealing with these contentions, I argue, is to also approach the challenge from a primary and secondary framework.

The ***primary order*** represents exigencies where people are able to reach a more definitive conclusion about whether an exception is justified. The imperative to save one’s sister-in-law is for Mencius, and I may add Wang, one such case. There is no question that all people of sound reason would act inappropriately (i.e., to touch the opposite gender) in order to save his or her life. To do otherwise would be in the Confucian judgment a failure of one’s responsibility. Wang would expect all clear-minded persons to recognize such an exception.

The *secondary order* consists of exigencies where people are less certain on whether an exception is warranted. The story of Emperor Shun, who neglected to inform his father of his marriage, is a case in point. Wang appears to endorse the Emperor's prerogative. Yet Wang also noted that this is a matter that the Emperor has resolved with his *liang-chih* (conscience). This suggests that Wang regarded the Emperor's action as a private decision that does not hold universal force, and others may indeed deem the Emperor as being unfilial. Wang, I argue, does recognize that there are situations when there is no clear discernment whether an exception to the rule is justified. In these situations, he accepts that there is no standard response and people have to act according to their own conscience and contextually determine the best possible response.

E3.3) Maintaining Objectivity in Diversity

The preceding analysis on practical knowledge shows that Wang does accord space for divergence and even for assertions that contradict his own. Wang's toleration of different and at times erroneous views raises the following concern: does accommodation of secondary moral wrongs compromise the objective order?

As discussed above in the section on the conceptual aspect, toleration of diverse opinions is a concession to subjectivism. Nevertheless, this is not extreme relativism, as people's freedom to express subjective views has limits. The primary order sets the outer boundaries which a person's opinions cannot transgress.

This formulation applies also to the practical order. A person may advance diverse practical opinions in the secondary order but may not violate the primary norms.

For example, in the case of the fair swimmer and a drowning child in a rapid, should he or she save the child? In these indeterminate situations, Wang concedes that there is no definitive answer and people are allowed to assert their particular opinions. However, in the more determinate cases, Wang would expect people to respond in conformity. For example, a child falls into a shallow well and the observer is an able-bodied person. In this case Wang would expect all able-bodied people to come to the child's assistance. A person cannot on the grounds of conscientious disagreement (for whatever reason) fail to respond.

To conclude, Wang, I argue, approaches the challenge of practical diversity by positing a two-tiered order. At its foundation are the primary norms derived from exigencies where people ought to know what is right. On this base is set the secondary norms drawn from the less determinate challenges. Wang would enforce strict compliance on the primary and accommodate diversity in the secondary. The differentiated responses, I submit, allow Wang to tolerate diverse and even erroneous views, without succumbing to extreme relativism.

F) Moral Frailty

The moral self is designed to derive judgments with reference to an objective norm. To be sure, a person's innate moral capability is never fully realized. Therefore, with no immunity from error, a person may fail to acquire the correct knowledge and perform the proper action. The reality of human fallibility raises the concern for moral oversight.

In Wang's framework, this supervision in the first instance emanates from the self. *Hsin* is the basic guide, and then together with *liang-chih* serves as the subsequent overseer. They act to prevent potential mistakes and also convict people of errors committed. If responsive, a person can overcome his or her moral lapses. And with this innate self-correcting capability, one progresses towards maturity. Alas, *hsin* and *liang-chih*'s ability to enforce their dictates has limits. *Hsin* and *liang-chih*'s pristine precepts, Wang concedes, may yet be defied.

“When [a good] thought or wish arises, the innate faculty of my mind already knows it to be good. *Suppose* I do not sincerely love it but instead turn away from it, I would then be regarding good as evil and obscuring my innate faculty which knows the good.” (Wang, 1985, p. 279, italics added)

Liang-chih knows what is right or wrong, yet I may still disregard it, Wang confesses.

This admission reveals Wang's acute awareness of how one may rebel against one's own better judgment. He continues:

“When [an evil] thought or wish arises, the innate faculty of my mind already knows it to be evil. *If* I did not sincerely hate it but instead carried it out, I would be regarding evil as good and obscuring my innate faculty which knows evil.” (Wang, 1985, p. 279, italics added)

Herein lies a reality check for Wang's fundamentally sanguine project. The human innate capability to realize *Tien's Tao* could be derailed by people's revolt against *liang-chih*.

F1) The Small Self

While affirming human potential, Wang is under no illusions about human fallibility and the peril it poses to the moral project. For Wang, all people possess the latent capacity to be a great man or *Chun Tzu*.

“Now the mind of everybody is at first not different from that of the sage.” (Wang, 1985, p. 118)

Nevertheless, the potential endowed in some people has been downsized due to moral neglect.

“Only because it is obstructed by selfishness and blocked by material desires, what was originally great becomes small and what was originally penetrating becomes obstructed.” (Wang, 1985, p. 118)

Due to inattention to self-inspection, the greatness envisioned has become small. Wang warns of the dire consequences that await the self that has degenerated into a diminutive form.

“When it [a small man’s mind] is aroused by desires and obscured by selfishness, compelled by greed for gain and fear of harm, and stirred by anger, he will destroy things, kill members of his own species, and will do everything. In extreme cases he will even slaughter his own brothers, and the humanity that forms one body will disappear completely.” (Wang, 1985, p. 273)

Wang also expressed his horror of the degraded self in a commentary on the case of the drowning child. While all are assumed to possess compassion, Wang warns that some may become so morally deformed as to react with inhumane indifference to a distressed child.

“Now to stand beside those drowning and make no attempt to save them but to bow, talk, and laugh is possible only for strangers who have no feelings natural to fellow beings . . . they will be considered to have no sense of pity and to be no longer human beings.” (Wang, 1985, p. 169)

Wang is keenly aware of how a person’s basic moral direction may become undermined. At best, a person may fail to do what he or she knows is right. At worst, a person’s moral compass may become so dysfunctional that it causes him or her to commit the most atrocious of acts.

F2) The Lost Self?

The reality of a person incurring serious moral impairment raises the question of whether a moral self can be permanently lost. Human vulnerability is certainly a major

concern for Wang. Nevertheless, in the following statement, Wang appears to suggest that a person's folly is an aberration. The innate moral compass in the morally warped person is never entirely disabled.

“No matter what man does, innate knowledge is in him and cannot be destroyed. Even a thief realizes in himself that he should not be a thief. If you call him a thief, he will still blush.” (Wang, 1985, p. 194)

In Wang's outlook, *liang-chih* may be weakened, yet it is not entirely lost but merely temporarily blinded.

“One's innate knowledge can only be obscured by material desires. It is within him and can never be lost. Similarly clouds may of course obscure the sun but the sun is never lost.” (Wang, 1985, p. 194)

In a more general exegesis of the moral self, Wang offers an analogy that categorizes people according to their different levels of progress in moral development.

“The knowledge of the sage is comparable to the sun in the clear sky, that of the worthy to the sun in the sky with floating clouds, and that of the stupid person to the sun on a dark, dismal day.” (Wang, 1985, p. 228)

For Wang, there are gradations in people's moral aptitudes depending on the effort invested in moral cultivation. These variations notwithstanding, he still argues that diverse groups share a certain innate capability, i.e., the ability to distinguish fundamental right and wrong.

“Although the three kinds of knowledge differ in darkness or clearness, they are the same in the fact that they can distinguish between black and white. Even in a dark night one can tell black and white in a hazy way, which shows that the sunlight has not entirely disappeared.” (Wang, 1985, p. 228)

Wang's exegesis suggests that even in the “stupid” person the faculty to differentiate certain basic moral black and white matters remains.

Without doubt Wang is concerned that the quest for *Tien's Tao* may be derailed by human inaptitude. Nevertheless, he never entirely writes off the human project. Even

when the individual errs and comes under the cover of heavy clouds, a ray of light lingers. The erring self has simply fallen asleep and when given the due prompting can be reawakened.

G) Moral Cultivation

While the human project is never completely lost, without due diligence it may yet be set adrift, falling short of its true potential. Wang's mission is to call for vigilance, exhorting people to self-cultivation, to bring to full expression their innate capability. The appeal is first directed at the individual, as he extols each to examine *hsin* and heed *liang-chih*. In a poetic expression, Wang compared self-introspection with polishing a mirror.

“Listening first with mixed doubt and belief.
My students find their heart finally revealed.
[Their hearts] are like mirrors in the mud,
Enclosing the light within the darkness.
Dust and dirt once removed,
The mirror will reflect the beautiful and the ugly.”
(Wang, quoted in Ching, 1976, p. 63)

The human person is designed with an internal moral faculty. If attention is given to careful nurturing, then the self is duly developed. Nevertheless, people do neglect to cultivate the self and thus may suffer impairment. This recognition of a person's limited ability for self-care shifts the focus to another source of oversight, i.e., external supervision. To be sure, the self is a morally autonomous entity. Nevertheless, the individual is not a detached being independent of outside influence and direction. A person's moral growth is as reliant on public guidance as it is on private effort. In Wang's vision, the realization of *Tao* involves both the individual's duty and the collective leadership's responsibility.

G1) Institutional Setup

In Wang's tradition, the responsibility for moral oversight is not restricted to any one external body. Wang conferred that responsibility across a wide spectrum of institutions ranging from the family and clan associations to communal organizations, public schools, and the state. The Confucian tradition operated out of their academies but did not regard these as the sole or primary loci of moral cultivation. The academies functioned as public institutions more akin to contemporary think tanks set up to promote Confucian teaching, which they regarded as public morality. This is in contrast to a religious system of temples and churches that are set up to promote a particular sectarian belief. In this sense, Confucianism was not an organized religion as commonly understood. Moreover, it did not regard its followers in the same way as some religious traditions do (e.g., expecting an exclusive allegiance to one particular creed). At the organizational level, the academies were not as extensively networked as other religious traditions with their temples and churches. Therefore, Wang was open to and indeed called upon diverse organizations, regardless of affiliation, to promote public morality. For Wang, the responsibility for moral development was not restricted to specific establishments but was spread across a broad range of human institutions.³⁸

G2) Medium of Cultivation

³⁸ The institutional role in the Confucian project has been debated and contrasted with the church's role in the Christian traditions. For a more extensive presentation of the institutional aspect of the Confucian program, in particular the family, see Julia Ching's *Confucianism and Christianity: a Comparative Study* (1977). Chapter 3 of James Behuniak's *Mencius on Becoming Human* (2005) presents an insightful analysis of the family within the Confucian cultivation project. See also Max Weber's *Religion of China* (1951) for an analysis of the formal Confucian literati's institutional setup within the Imperial framework.

The goal of moral cultivation is to extend people's innate moral knowledge and to develop the self into a *Chun Tzu*. To that end, Wang's project may be viewed as consisting of two parts: the study program and the spiritual program to cultivate the mind and the senses, respectively.

One cornerstone in Wang's project is the cultivation of the intellect, i.e., the study program. The underlying aim is to develop vigorous and critical thinking.

“To be apprehensive is also thought. The thought of apprehension never ceases. If it is not preserved in any way, it will become either dull and stupid or evil.”
(Wang, 1985, p. 78)

Wang warns that failure to train one's thinking leads to a decline into dullness. And for him the *modus operandi* is to engage people in conceptual learning.

The Confucians had a venerated intellectual history, presenting themselves as “learned men.” Their scholarly tradition was centered on the study of the classical texts, i.e., the *Analects*, *Poetry*, *History*, etc. Confucianism was also renowned for its examination system set up to train “cultured men of learning” skilled in subjects ranging from the arts and literature to history and statecraft.

The other anchor in the Confucian project is the spiritual program that seeks to nurture people's moral sensibility. The aim, broadly conceived, is to ensure acquisition of the skills and virtues need to properly conduct human relationships.

“In educating young boys today, the sole task should be to teach filial piety, brotherly respect, loyalty, faithfulness, propriety, righteousness, integrity, and the sense of shame.” (Wang, 1985, p. 183)

The *modus operandi* is to engage people in practical rituals that exercise their moral sensibility. In the *Instruction for Practical Living*, Wang suggested a wide spectrum of

practices conducive to moral cultivation, including calligraphy, archery, horse-riding, reading, and even singing. Here is one of Wang's commentaries on the role that singing (or its lack) plays in the development of the self.

"The ways to raise and cultivate them are to lure them to singing so their will will be roused, to direct them to practice etiquette so their demeanor will be dignified . . . Today singing songs and practicing etiquette are often regarded as unrelated to present needs. This is the view of small and vulgar people of this degenerate modern age." (Wang, 1985, p. 183)

Wang's project for moral cultivation, I suggest, may also be organized into two levels. At the "high end" were the religious rituals designed to nurture human reverence for the divine and the transcendent. These entailed sacred worship, prayers, meditation, etc. At the "low end" were the civil rituals intended to cultivate interpersonal human sensibilities. These included the mundane daily rites of filial duty as well as the special events of births, wedding celebrations, funerals, and ancestral worship.

G3) Stages and Priority: Primary and Secondary Expectations

In the pursuit of the *Chun Tzu*, Wang's strategy and approach, I argue, can be labeled as incremental.

To begin, Wang recognized the self as developing in stages. Here is how he describes, in first person, the need to tailor the cultivation program in line with each person's moral standing.

"In the extension of knowledge, we should do so according to our capacity. Here is our innate knowledge today. We should extend it to the utmost according to what we know today. As our innate knowledge is further developed tomorrow, we should extend it to the utmost according to what we know then." (Wang, 1985, p. 200)

To be sure, all people should aspire to be a sage.

"The Sage was anxious to have everyone become a sage." (Wang, 1985, p. 213)

However, the implementation of the plan needs to account for people's varying locations in the moral development scale.

“But people vary in endowment. In giving them education, there should be an order. If you talk of the nature and destiny of man and things to people below average, they do not understand. It is necessary to polish them slowly.” (Wang, 1985, p. 213)

For Wang it is crucial to customize the cultivation effort to individual needs and to ensure that people grow according to their respective development stages. Here is another statement addressing this concern:

“In discussing learning with others we should also do so according to their capacity. For instance, when the tree has sprouted only a little, give it a little water. As the sprout grows, give it more water . . . the watering should be done according to its capacity to absorb.” (Wang, 1985, p. 200)

The general effort and concern to cater to people's specific needs, I submit, also defines the overall goals of Wang's project. His expectations are multiple and are prioritized according to the primary and secondary norms.

Wang's main objective is to ensure full compliance to the primary order. Regardless of the variables in people's moral standings, all are expected, at the least, to show competence in the primary norms. The doctrine of human nature is one that every person is assumed to be able to comprehend and ought to affirm. For Wang, this is the minimal requirement of what constitutes a moral self.

Beyond the primary, Wang's demands are less stringent. With regard to the secondary norms his expectations are tailored to people's particular status. Ideally, he hopes that all would conform to his version of the secondary norms. In reality, though, Wang allows for difference. For example, regarding the *Ta Hsueh's* four steps, while he

has specific views and wishes to see others comply with his perspective, he does not expect all to do so. At this level, his goal is to merely help people acquire the skills to respond in the best possible manner to the less determinate challenges.

In summation, Wang aspires to see all transformed into *Chun Tzu*, yet he is realistic. His priority is to ensure that all people at the least meet the minimal prerequisite of what it is to be a moral person, i.e., compliance with the primary order. It is upon this basic requirement that Wang raises his expectation to the higher ideal of the *Chun Tzu*, where a person would acquire the more complex skills of dealing with the secondary order.

H) Wang's Specific Concerns

For Wang, the realization of the *Tao* is both the individual's duty and the collective leadership's responsibility. When institutions charged with that trust, i.e., the schools, academies, temples, and the state, do develop and implement sound and balanced study and spiritual programs, then the human quest for the *Tao* is set on sound footing. Alas, as human entities, these institutions of leadership are not immune from errors. Wang was mindful of how communities fragmented and dynasties fell on account of failed leadership. This was the case with the Ming Dynasty, when it began to unravel under inept leadership; the Imperial inner courts were overrun by corrupt bureaucrats and the outer courts were manned by the misguided public intelligentsia. Thus, Wang's exhortations was as much directed at entreating those entrusted with leadership responsibility to fulfill their duty as it was focused on encouraging the individual person to be true to *hsin*. The challenge is to ensure that the schools, academies, temples, and the

state were led by competent personnel who promoted proper study and spiritual programs. Herein lay Wang's particular concerns with Mohism, Chu, and Buddhism, for these were schools and traditions that had assumed moral leadership positions yet in varying degrees failed to fulfill their responsibilities.

*H1) Mo Tzu*³⁹

Mo Tzu (470–390 BCE) was Confucius' (551–479 BCE) near-contemporary during the classical period. With Confucius, Mo affirmed that the *Tien's Tao* for humanity was for all people to co-exist harmoniously. However, they differed on how this was to be realized. Confucius anchored the effort in a person's ability to be impartial, and the task was to exhort people to activate that potential. Mo disagreed. For him, harmonious co-existence cannot be actualized by appealing to human benevolence, because by nature humans do not possess that virtue of impartiality that Confucius assumed.

Confucius, according to Mo, misread nature and misrepresented human nature.

There was no order in nature's original state and no indication of a human moral capacity for benevolence.

“In the beginning of human life, when there was yet no law and government, the custom was: ‘Every man according to his own idea.’ Thus when there was one man there was one idea, when two men two ideas, and when ten men there were ten different ideas. The more people there were, the more were the different concepts. Hence each man approved of his own view and disapproved of that of others, and so there arose mutual disapproval among men. As a result, father and

³⁹ The following analysis of Wang's response to the Mohists is an inferred construction. I have placed Wang's criticism in the “primary and secondary” framework, showing how he would evaluate the severity of the Mohists' errors. These are categories are implicit in Wang's works (see section E2.2). This construction of Wang's evaluation of the Mohists is replicated in the sections on Chu Hsi and the Buddhists.

son, and elder and younger brothers became enemies and estranged from each other, and were unable to reach any agreement. The people of the world worked against each other with water, fire and poison. Surplus energy was not spent for mutual aid: surplus goods were allowed to rot without sharing; excellent teachings were kept secret and not taught to one another. The disorder in the [human] world was like that among birds and beasts.” (*Mo Tzu*, in Watson trans., 1967, p. 34)

Confucius’ misreading of human nature and his idealistic appeal to virtue, the Mohists claimed, yielded no results. In fact, the Mohists argued, the repeated lack of success caused the Confucians to descend into two forms of moral defeatism. The first is fatalism, the debilitating lack of resolve to act on moral imperatives.

“The Confucians believe firmly in the existence of fate and propound their doctrine, saying, ‘Long life or early death, wealth or poverty, safety or danger, order or disorder are all decreed by the ordinance of *Tien* and cannot be modified. Failure and success, rewards and punishments, good fortune and bad, are all fixed. Human wisdom and strength can do nothing.’ If the various officials believe such ideas, they will be lax in their duties, and if the common people believe them, they will neglect their task.” (*Mo Tzu*, in Watson trans., 1967, p. 126-127)

The second was parochialism, which was reflected in the Confucian disengagement from the grassland tribes, which the Mohists framed as a Confucian failure to affirm universal love.

The cure for the Confucian ills, said Mo, was to discard their ideal of impartial virtue and embrace the pragmatic appeal to self-interest. People’s lack of motivation to act, i.e., fatalism, according to the Mohists, can be overcome if self-interest is assured.

The same principle applies to parochialism. The Confucians should engage the grassland tribes, the Mohists argued, if not for duty’s sake then out of an enlightened, self-interested sense of universal love.

“Those who love others will be loved by others. Those who benefit others will be benefited by others. Those who hate others will be hated by others. And those who harm others will be harmed by the others.” (*Mo Tzu*, in Watson trans., 1967, p. 214)

For the Mohists, humans by nature are bent on self-interest, a moral condition that cannot be remedied by simply extolling virtue. The Mohist vision of human co-existence was founded on self-interested reciprocity. Human community is secured, said Mo, only when people are assured of mutual self-benefit.⁴⁰

The Mohist school was dismissed by the Confucians as pandering a philosophy of profit over duty. The Mohists and their counterparts the Legalists did enjoy considerable clout during the Warring States period, and for some time their ideas were the dominant state ideology. As China transitioned from its traumatic early years to the more stable era of the Han, Mohism's influence began to wane and was eventually replaced by Confucianism as the official state philosophy. They never regained their national status, yet the Mohist "state of mind," i.e., their ethical egoism, persisted. Thus, during the Ming era the Mohist mindset continued to find a convenient host in people's stubborn bonds to selfish vices. This motivated Wang to present a Confucian refutation of an old thesis that refused to go away.

"For up to the present time it has been several thousand years since the point of the doctrine of success and profit has infected the innermost recesses of man's mind and has become his second nature. People have mutually boasted of their knowledge, crushed one another with power, rivaled each other for profit, mutually strive for superiority through skill, and attempted success through fame." (Wang, 1985, p. 123)

In Wang's assessment, the Mohists had failed in their basic comprehension, i.e., they neglected to affirm something that all people ought to know. The Mohists simply misconstrued human nature. If sound reason is applied, Wang argued, one would recognize that in spite of moral frailty humans by nature do possess the capability to be

⁴⁰ Benjamin Schwartz's *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (1985) and Burton Watson's *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsun Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu* (1967) provide introductory and

impartial. Wang also charged the Mohists with presenting a misconstrued universal love as a means to overcome the ills of fatalism and parochialism.

“Mo Tzu’s doctrine of universal love went too far in the practice of humanity, and Yang Chu’s doctrine of egoism went too far in practice of righteousness. Did these doctrines destroy truth and violate moral standards to such a high degree as to be capable of deceiving the whole world? And yet their harmful effort that had developed was such that Mencius compared these men to beasts and barbarians. It was because they did what is called destroying later generations by means of learning.” (Wang, 1985, p. 163)

For Wang, Mo Tzu’s erroneous teachings have devastating effects on human societies with effects lasting generations. Wang conceded that these were real moral dilemmas that had inflicted the Chinese. However, he countered that these were not due to a human inability for impartiality; rather, they are the result of people’s failure to activate their innate capability. The remedy therefore lies in exhorting people to virtue rather than self-interest; only then will they be able to truly overcome the malaise of fatalism and parochialism.

Within the two-tiered (primary and secondary) prioritized framework, the Mohist program, in Wang’s assessment, would constitute a failure at the primary level. The Mohists’ study program, in Wang’s judgment, failed to affirm the fundamental doctrine necessary for a basic understanding of nature. Specifically, the Mohist interpretation of human nature, when presented as a truism, contradicted the foundational knowledge that people ought to possess. The Mohist spiritual program, in Wang’s assessment, neglected to provide the primary rituals to cultivate basic human sensibilities, specifically in the Mohist disregard of family relationships. By diminishing the import of basic human ties, the Mohists failed to nurture genuine compassion, i.e., sincerity, in human relationships.

substantive analyses of Mohism, respectively.

And this also led to the Confucian critique of the Mohists' notion of universal love as an "ethics without father."

In response to the Mohists' mistakes, Wang's remedial effort was twofold. In the study program, the objective was to correct the conceptual errors of the Mohists. Wang's effort was first to counter Mohism with the correct conceptual interpretation of nature and then to ensure that people are schooled in the appropriate teachings, exhorting them to affirm their natural reason and sense of impartiality.

In the spiritual program, the aim was to restore those rituals needed to nurture basic human sensibilities. Wang's effort was to exhort people to a renewed attention to cultivating the five basic human ties, beginning with the father-son relationship. Wang's ridicule of the Mohists' idea of universal love as "ethics without father" was a critique of their failure to attend to one's basic relationships before attempting the loftier challenge of universal concern.

"The love between father and son and between elder and younger brothers is the starting point of the human mind's spirit of life, just like the sprout of the tree. From here it is extended to humaneness to all people and love to all things. It is just like the growth of the trunk, branches, and leaves. Mo Tzu's universal love makes no distinction in human relations and regards one's own father, son, elder brother, or younger brother as being the same as a passer-by. That means that Mo Tzu's universal love has no starting point. It does not sprout. We therefore know that it has no root and that it is not a process of unceasing production and reproduction. How can it be called humanity? Filial piety and brotherly respect are the root of humanity. This means that the principle of humanity grows from within." (Wang, 1985, p. 57)

Wang's criticism was a reminder that the cultivation of moral sensibility needs to be developed in proper stages.

Historically, the relationship between the Confucians and the Mohists was contentious from the beginning. The Confucians, including Wang, regarded the Mohist thesis as a fundamental violation of basic values which people of fair reason ought to know. For that reason, the Confucian academies had little room for the Mohist position and treated it as heterodoxy and censured it accordingly. At the state level, Mohism's standing was mixed. It enjoyed dominant stature during the Warring States period (470–390 BCE) and in the Chin (221–206 BCE) and Han (206 BCE – 220 CE) dynasties but later never attained the same influential positions. During the Ming dynasty, the Mohist presence was mostly felt within academia rather than in the seat of power, i.e., the Imperial Courts. The Mohists still existed as a formidable school of thought, but they no longer held commensurate political sway. Since they did not present an immediate political threat to the Ming state, there is no record of any state-sponsored ban or persecution of the Mohists.

*H2) Chu Hsi*⁴¹

Chu Hsi (1130–1200 CE) is widely recognized as the key figure in restoring classical Confucianism during the Sung dynasty. Chu was responding to what he perceived as the pervasive disorderliness in the then Confucian cultivation program, the cause of which he believed was an excessive reliance on sense over reason, which was in large part the result of undue Buddhist influences. Chu's effort began with a debate with Lu Chiu Yuan (1139–1193 CE) over *Tien Li*. Both affirmed *Tien Li*'s omnipresence and

⁴¹ For more on Chu Hsi and Wang's debate with the Chu school, consult Chan Wing-tsit (ed.), *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism* (1986) and Daniel Gardner's *Chu Hsi: Learning To Be a Sage* (1990).

held that the human task was to discern the intent of *Tien* as represented in *Li*. However, they differed over where the focus should be set; should it be directed at a person's *hsin* or at things outside of the self? For Lu, *Tien Li* resides primarily in *hsin*; therefore, self-cultivation is a matter of inward meditation without too much reliance on extensive curricular guidance. For Chu, if *Tien Li* is ubiquitous, then it is to be investigated everywhere, including things external to the self. Chu charged that under Lu's guidance, the Confucian cultivation program suffered for lack of an orderly system of study and the Confucian tradition of rigorous education deteriorated into haphazard learning. Chu criticized Lu's project as being dangerously "Buddhistic," the consequences of which were dire.

"The learning of Ch'an Buddhism is most damaging to the Tao . . . It is unnecessary to make a detailed investigation in order to understand the nature of learning of Buddhism . . . Their abandonment of the Three Bonds [ruler – minister, father – son, husband – wife] and Five Constant Relationships [parent – child, ruler – minister, husband – wife, brother – brother, friend – friend] alone is already a grave sin, let alone the other sins they have committed." (quoted in Chan, 1986, p. 396)

Chu appealed to the authority of the *Ta Hsueh* (Great Learning) to further his argument.

The *Ta Hsueh* had instituted four basic steps of self-cultivation: (1) *hsin* (rectify the heart/mind), (2) *cheng* (make the thoughts sincere), (3) *chih-chih* (extend knowledge), and (4) *ko-wu* (investigate things). Chu charged that the Lu school neglected the fourth step, *ko-wu*, which entails diligent contemplation of external things.

"I would say that extension of knowledge and investigation of things are the beginning of the learning according to the *Ta Hsueh* . . . Since the knowledge extended is shallow or deep in degree, how can it be the case that our innate knowledge of the good which is the same as that of legendary sage-emperors Yao and Sun is all of a sudden seen? If it were the case, it would be just like Ch'an Buddhism's empty talk about 'hearing just once amounts to awakening one thousand times' or 'direct attainment of enlightenment by one instant leap.' This is not the genuine Confucian task of 'enlightening one's good nature' and 'making oneself sincere.'" (quoted in Chan, 1986, p. 395)

Chu's remedial effort therefore was to restore the import of *ko-wu*, and he did this by reversing the order of the four steps. Instead of beginning the process of self-cultivation with the inner discipline of *hsin*, Chu started with the last step, i.e., *ko-wu*. Chu's effort to redirect attention to the external took two general forms. The first was to reform the Confucian study program. Chu set out to restore the Confucian curriculum based on the classical texts and was instrumental in developing the Four Books. The second was to redevelop the spiritual program. Though critical of excessive meditation, Chu nevertheless continued to maintain the importance of religious meditation but shifted the focus from inward gazing to outward concentration, i.e., directing the mind to things outside of the self, e.g., the bamboo. For Chu, there is no shortcut to moral development. Self-cultivation requires diligent and orderly study and disciplined rituals.

The reform Chu implemented was an enduring one, as it remained the standard of the Chinese education system until the first decade of the 20th century. The longevity of Chu's program, however, did not free it from problems and criticism. Like any system, Chu's project faced the challenges of fossilization and routinization. And in the late Ming period, the Chu school faced one formidable critic, Wang Yang-Ming. In Wang's view, Chu's reforms set in place some 200 years before were in need of a fresh infusion of *jen* (spirit).

Chu's effort to redirect attention to the external, in Wang's assessment, was excessive. Wang traced Chu's predicament to the Chu-Lu debate, and he aligned with the Lu school in affirming *li* as residing primarily in the self, thus challenging Chu's stress on

li as being external. Wang criticized Chu's project as overemphasizing external study without adequate attention to internal inspection of the self.

“Now if we wish to get rid of the obscuration of the mind and do not know how to direct our effort to innate knowledge but seek remedy outside, we are comparable to a person whose vision is not clear and who, instead of taking medicine and nourishing his eyes in order to cure them, merely wanders despondently and seeks vision outside. Can vision be attained from the outside?” (Wang, 1985, p. 102)

In the main, Wang critiqued Chu's project as being overly rationalistic, neglecting to nurture the senses. Within his framework of cultivation, Wang in general faulted Chu for an unequal attention to the study program vis-à-vis the spiritual program, i.e., developing an elaborate educational curriculum with no equivalent focus on practical rituals.

Within the two-tiered (primary and secondary) prioritized framework, Chu's program, in Wang's assessment, would constitute a failure at the secondary level. Chu's study program affirmed the primary doctrines but advanced secondary teachings that Wang regarded as sterile (for example, Chu's sanitized interpretation of the *Tien* as contained primarily in the classical written text). Chu's spiritual program did support the primary rituals but developed secondary practices that Wang regarded as mundane (for instance, Chu's meditational emphasis that was directed outwards [the bamboo] rather than inwards [the heart]).

On the whole, Wang depicted Chu's cultivation program as suffering from hollowness and bankruptcy.

“The width of their knowledge of memorized texts merely serves to increase their pride. The wealth of learning they possess merely contributes to their evil actions. The breath of information they have accumulated by hearing and seeing merely helps them to indulge in arguments. Their skills in prose-writing merely cover up their hypocrisy.” (Wang, 1985, p. 123)

The consequence of Chu's unbalanced effort was that the Chu disciple over time would suffer a general lack of sense-induced vitality, specifically at the level of the secondary norms. Chu's project would produce a person competent in the primary challenges but lacking the skills to manage the secondary challenges.

In light of Chu's overemphasis on the rational, Wang's corrective effort stressed a renewing of focus on the senses. Wang began with the same invocation of *Ta Hsueh's* authority as Chu had made earlier. However, he reversed Chu's sequencing of the four steps to its original order, starting with (1) *hsin* (rectify the internal heart/mind) and then proceeding with (2) *cheng* (making the thoughts sincere), (3) *chih-chih* (extending knowledge), and (4) *ko-wu* (investigating things). For Wang, the focus of self-cultivation is now set on *hsin*, i.e., rectifying the internal heart/mind. Wang's remedial effort involved issuing a general call for a return to the simplicity of learning, exhorting people to concentrate on the true spirit of study, challenging them to examine their hearts in the pursuit of genuine knowledge.

Historically, the disputes between the two Confucian schools of thought were acrimonious. At the academic level, although each had reservations about the other's moral priorities, Wang nevertheless regarded Chu's deficiencies as secondary and by-and-large tolerated their differences.

“When at times my ideas are different from those of Hui-an [Chi Hsi], it is because I had to argue for my position, so that the student may not make an infinitesimal mistake in the beginning and end up with an infinite error. But my ultimate purpose and that of Hui-an are not different. For the rest, where his statements and explanations are clear and appropriate, why does a single word of his need to be altered?” (Wang, 1985, p. 60)

At the state level, however, their dispute did result in some political recriminations directed at Wang. To be sure, the Chu school dominated the Ming bureaucracy and Wang's criticism of Chu was in effect a rebuke of the political status quo. Though Wang was never censured outright, his reputation nevertheless was subjected to attack.

*H3) The Buddhists*⁴²

Buddhism was introduced to China around 200 CE and flourished during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE). Though it was never installed by the Imperial Court as the state religion, it did enjoy a widespread following among the masses. For the Confucians, Buddhism's main attraction was its elaborate meditative practices, and these were integrated into the Chinese moral landscape as a sense-focused counterweight to the dominant rationality of Confucianism. The Confucians were mindful that the adaptation of Buddhism was part of the larger delicate act of balancing between reason and sense. Any imbalance could result in excesses on either side. If the sense cultivated by the Buddhists is not adequately checked by appropriate reason, this would lead to immoderation. The Confucians' concern with Buddhist intemperance was expressed in two general forms. The first was concern with the Buddhist propensity for esoteric, extra-rational, conceptual pronouncements regarding nature and the transcendent.

“It is precisely people who are characterized by stubborn emptiness and abstract tranquility who are incapable of carefully examining the Principle of Nature in the mind in connection with things and events as they come, and of extending their innate or original knowledge of the good. Instead they abandon human relations and get used to a life of silence, annihilation, emptiness, and nothingness.” (Wang, 1985, p. 103)

⁴² For more on Buddhism in China and the Ming era, see Timothy Brook's *The Chinese State in the Ming Dynasty* (2005), Michael Dillon's *Religious Minorities and China* (2001), and I-Fan Yang's *Buddhism in China* (1969).

The second is related to what the Confucians regarded as the Buddhists' negation of social responsibility due to their tendency to withdraw into a hermit-like existence.

“The Buddhists are afraid of the burden involved in the father-son relationship and so run away from it. They are afraid of the burden involved in the ruler-minister relationship and so run away from it. They are afraid of the burden involved in the husband-wife relationship and so run away from it. They do all this because [these] relationships involve attachment to the phenomenal order . . . We Confucians accept the father-son relationship and fulfill this responsibility with humanity. We accept the ruler-minister relationship and fulfill it with righteousness. We accept the husband-wife relationship and fulfill it with attention to the separate functions it involves. When have we been *attached* to these relationships?” (Wang, 1985, p. 205, italics added)

In the Ming era, Buddhism had a promising start when the dynasty's founder, Zhu Yuanzhang, became a Buddhist patron. For the most part, Buddhism played the expected role in the Ming court; nevertheless, there were occasional Confucian laments that unchecked Buddhist sensibility was undermining the moral project. Wang echoed the prevailing Ming era Confucian concern when he observed:

“. . . the Buddhists insist on getting away from things and events completely and viewing the mind as an illusion, gradually entering into a life of emptiness and silence, seemingly to have nothing to do with the world at all. This is why they are incapable of governing the world.” (Wang, 1985, p. 220)

In the main, Wang faulted the Buddhist project for being overly sense-oriented, neglecting to nurture the mind. Within his framework of cultivation, Wang criticized the Buddhists for an unequal attention to the spiritual program vis-à-vis the study program, devoting more time to spiritual meditation with no equivalent commitment to study.

Within the two-tiered (primary and secondary) prioritized framework, the Buddhist program, in Wang's assessment, would constitute a failure at the secondary level. The Buddhist study program maintained the primary beliefs but some of their secondary teachings were, in Wang's view, too esoteric (for example, their notion of the transcendent being represented in the human form of the Buddha). The Buddhists'

spiritual program likewise maintained the primary rituals, yet some of their secondary rites were, in Wang's assessment, too radical (for example, meditative practices that demanded extreme withdrawal from society). The consequence of Buddhism's unbalanced effort was that the Buddhist person suffered a general lack of rational restraint and was thus vulnerable to recklessness, specifically at the level of secondary norms.

“In the past there have, of course, been people who wanted to manifest their clear character. But simply because they did not know how to abide by the highest good, but instead drove their own minds towards something too lofty, they thereby lost themselves in illusions, emptiness, and quietness, having nothing to do with the work of the family, the state, and the world. Such are the followers of Buddhism” (Wang, 1985, p. 274-275)

The Buddhist project would produce a person competent in the primary but lacking the skills to manage the secondary challenges.

In light of Buddhism's excessive reliance on the senses, Wang focused his remedial effort on restoring the proper role of the rational. He began with a highly critical assessment of the Buddhist reliance on sense.

“. . . they fix their mind on some unclear, unknown place . . . and then suddenly become 'enlightened.'" (Wang, 1985, p. 280)

He also accused the Buddhists of cutting corners, seeking a shortcut to enlightenment.

“[they follow a] 'labor saving' method, less arduous [and] place a large ban on reading books and probing principles.” (Wang, 1985, p. 280)

Wang criticized the Buddhists for relegating study to a mere supporting role. Therefore, he called on the Buddhists to renew attention to diligent learning, to maintain more balance between the study and spiritual programs. Moral development, Wang reminded the Buddhists, does not come suddenly without struggle; rather, it requires long, concerted, and rigorous effort.

“Unless one studies extensively, inquires accurately, thinks carefully, and sifts clearly so as to understand the principles of things, one cannot recognize the activating power of good and evil or the distinction between truth and falsehood.” (Wang, 1985, p. 100)

Wang’s promotion of study appears to contradict his earlier criticism of Chu’s excessive focus on study. Is Wang being inconsistent or hypocritical? His doubled-sided appeals show the complexity of any balancing act. He was playing the middleman, seeking to curb excesses on two sides, the Chu school and Buddhism. In the eyes of his critics, Wang was not always successful in that delicate dance and he was accused of being the primary culprit for the neglect of study during the late Ming era. This led Wang to try to defend himself.

“I have never warned people against investigating the principle of things to the utmost nor urged them to live in deep seclusion, sit erect, and do things. My idea is that it is incorrect to interpret the investigation of the principle of things to the utmost as we come into contact with them to mean what I have described before as devoting oneself to external things and neglecting the internal.” (Wang, 1985, p. 103)

Historically, the relationship between Buddhism and Confucianism may be described as one of reserved respect. Wang’s personal life reflected this tension. He embraced Buddhism early, and during his youth spent some critical formative time in a secluded Buddhist retreat. As he embarked on his career as a Confucian official, he retained an affinity for his early faith. When navigating through the Ming state’s machinery, he appealed to Buddhist sensibility to try to infuse some spirit into what he perceived as a routinized bureaucracy. Wang was not oblivious to Buddhist excesses, yet he regarded the Buddhists’ flaws as secondary failures and in general tolerated their idiosyncrasies.

“Reduced to the fundamentals, the Buddhists . . . are somewhat similar to the Confucians. However they have only the upper section and neglect the lower

section, and in the end are not as perfect as the Sage. Nevertheless we cannot deny that they are similar in the upper section.” (Wang, 1985, p. 41)⁴³

At the state level, Buddhism’s overall position in the Chinese order was one of calm co-existence with the Confucian organization. Nevertheless, there were moments when it became the subject of the state’s punitive actions, primarily because of political infractions, e.g., the failure of Buddhist monasteries to pay taxes, rather than deep doctrinal disputes or fundamental differences in moral outlook.

Conclusion

Born into a family of Confucian officials, Wang Yang-Ming aspired to a career of public service and his commitment was rewarded with a dramatic life. He began in the Ming capital, Beijing, as a censor for the central government, was promoted to the governorship of a local province, and was at one time even called to take on the mantle of a military general to suppress a regional uprising. Wang served with the venerated Confucian ethos, girded by a deep conviction of *Tien*’s empowerment, and spoke with moral clarity and courage, even at the risk of offending the earthly powers that be. For this uncompromising certitude, Wang paid a personal price, as had many Confucians before him. He was exiled to the hinterlands for reeducation when he chastised the Emperor’s favorite, and very powerful, eunuch for misdemeanors. For his daringness to challenge the status quo, Wang became the target of reprisals, and his political and moral standing suffered as a result. Not long after his death, Wang became the scapegoat for the

⁴³ Wang recognized the Buddhists and Confucians as sharing certain fundamentals, referring to these commonalities as the “upper section.” Nevertheless, the Buddhists lack what Wang calls proper development on the “lower section.” I have used this upper and lower distinction to infer Wang’s framework as being two-tiered, consisting of the primary and the secondary (see Section E2.1).

ills of a fast-collapsing Ming dynasty, and he was accused of leaving his official post without permission and of teaching heretical doctrines. His reputation was later restored posthumously, though he remained a controversial figure within Confucian orthodoxy. Among the Neo-Confucian notables, Wang is often contrasted with Chu Hsi, and most historians see Chu, whose reforms had a more extensive and enduring impact on the Chinese landscape, as eclipsing Wang. Yet Wang does stand as one among equals in the pantheon of Confucian luminaries and did leave his own distinctive legacy.

Wang's main project was to revive the Ming order that had turned into "dry wood and dead ashes," and his efforts at reinvigoration bore three distinguishing features. First, his overt appeal to Buddhism as a counterbalance to Confucianism set him apart from the predominantly rational Confucian reformers. To be sure, he had reservations about Buddhist "disorderliness," yet he saw the Confucian tyranny of order as a greater threat. Even though he was a Confucian bureaucrat, his moral intuition continued to show a deep affinity for the Buddhists' instinctive moral sentiment. Second, Wang was also unique for his invocation of *liang-chih*. Until Wang, the Confucian conception of the moral anatomy was limited to *hsin*. His exposé on *liang-chih* introduced a sharper focus on the self's capability for inner correction. Third, Wang's combined petition to Buddhism and *liang-chih* as a critique of the establishment bears a distinctive egalitarian appeal. His call was to abandon the "mindless study" that had overcome the educational system and to recapture the spirit of true learning. Certainly, he never abandoned the Confucian system, but he was willing to explore resources beyond the conventional order. By appealing directly to the people's *liang-chih* and to Buddhism, Wang sidestepped the establishment and this had the critical effect of reawakening the Confucian egalitarian vision.

Confucianism, to be sure, is rooted in the belief of the potential of all humans, yet in practice its centralized examination system had over time metamorphosed into unintentionally producing an elite ruling and scholarly class. Wang's project sought to shift the moral initiative back to the common man, returning the search for moral leadership to the masses.

Wang's unconventional views at times placed his affiliation with the Confucian tradition into question. Yet his most important message to his fellow Ming remained at its heart Confucian. In the midst of political chaos and moral disillusionment, he reasserted the Confucian hope. To be sure, experiences of hardship can lead one down the path of despair, and in the late Ming period, there was no shortage of calamities to precipitate such a slide into despondency. Yet Wang pleaded against falling into hopelessness and, in particular, into the Mohist state of mind. His plea was no mere textbook "feel good" rhetorical appeal. He knew firsthand the precariousness of Confucian idealism, as he personally suffered at the hands of wayward officials. Yet he chose to hold firm to the Confucian faith. For Wang, deviation from the *Tao* is no reason to succumb to Mohist melancholy, an outlook that does not reflect the true nature of things and does not represent the *Tien*'s real intent. He pleaded with the people not to give up on *Tien*. Moral development might progress unevenly across human history and at times humanity might appear to have been abandoned by *Tien* to its own devices and vices, yet the *Tien*'s goodwill ensures that the human cause will not be entirely marooned.

"Fortunately, the *Tien Li* is inherent in the human mind and can never be destroyed and the intelligence of innate knowledge shines through eternity without variation. Therefore when they hear my doctrine of pulling up the roots and stopping up the source, surely some will be pitifully distressed and compassionately pained, and will indignantly rise up, like a stream or a river

which cannot be stopped, bursting its banks. To whom shall I look if not to heroic scholars who will rise up without further delay?" (Wang, 1985, p. 124)

Wang's vision may be summed up in two key doctrines. The first is the vision of common humanity that conveys the faith in human possibility, humanity's capacity for harmonious co-existence. It extols the belief in one's own moral potential and confidence in the capability of one's fellow humans.

"If people of the world merely devote their effort to extending their innate knowledge they will naturally share with all a universal sense of right and wrong, share their likes and dislikes, regard other people as their own persons, regard the people of other countries as their own family, and look upon Heaven, Earth, and all things as one body." (Wang, 1985, p. 167)

The second is the doctrine of *Tien* that relays the recognition that the human project is actually the realization of the will of a transcendent authority and that the vision of harmonious co-existence cannot be fulfilled without an appeal to the power of *Tien*.

"Our nature is the substance of the mind and Heaven is the source of our nature. To exert one's mind to the utmost is the same as fully developing one's nature. Only those who are absolutely sincere can fully develop their nature and know the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth." (Wang, 1985, p. 13)

For Wang these two doctrines were the foundation of the human project. People may disagree over the best approaches to realize the human telos, as was the case with the Chu and Buddhist disputes, but for Wang there was no room for disagreement on these two fundamentals. History and human events may at times betray the ideals of the vision, yet Wang believed that one must reaffirm faith in one's fellow humans and in the transcendent and not abandon the core beliefs, as the Mohists had. The central message of Wang's vision is to hold firm to the faith in human possibility and in *Tien's* benevolence even in the face of conceptual disagreements and historical anomalies.

Chapter 4: Comparing Butler and Wang

Human civilizations through the ages have encountered each other with varied outcomes. One particular interaction that has captured much interest is the general meeting of East and West, which includes the more specific coming together of Christianity and Confucianism. By the time of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644 CE), the Chinese literati had been introduced to the Christian worldview through the Nestorians (during the Tang Dynasty, 618–907 CE) and Marco Polo’s adventure to the East (during the Yuan era, 1279–1368 CE). During Wang Yang-ming’s era, the Christian venture to China continued with the Jesuit missions led by Francis Xavier (1506–1552 CE) and later Matteo Ricci (1552–1610 CE). In Joseph Butler’s 18th century, European travelers returning from the Far East were bearing news of civilizations foreign and ancient. The Deist Lord Herbert Cherbury (1584–1648 CE), England’s ambassador in Paris, who had extensive contact with the continental maritime merchant class, showed particular interest in the Eastern traditions and became a pioneering and influential messenger of the East. Deism became the English moral tradition that most embodied the influence of the East.⁴⁴ Subsequent centuries witnessed an increased Western curiosity in Eastern religious and philosophical traditions. Since the beginning of these historic encounters in centuries past, significant efforts have been invested on both sides, East and West, to establish a better and deeper mutual understanding.

⁴⁴ See Peter Gay’s *Deism, An Anthology* (1968) for a fuller account of the English Deist movement and its role in the increasing encounters between the Christian West and non-Christian civilizations.

In this chapter I present a comparison of Christianity and Confucianism and, more specifically, representations of these venerated traditions by Butler and Wang.⁴⁵ The primary aim is to enhance understanding of Christianity and Confucianism by way of a descriptive comparing and contrasting of their similarities and differences.⁴⁶

A) *Moral Vision*

In the moments of crisis that they faced in 18th century England and 15th century China, Butler and Wang urged their fellow English and Ming to recapture the ideals put forth by their respective Christian and Confucian visions. At the outset, common features are discernable in Butler's and Wang's pleas, e.g., they both believed that humankind is intended to fulfill a divine order. Without question there are also differences, particularly in their conceptions of the transcendent, its sacred plans, and the process to actualize these goals.

A1) *The Transcendent*

⁴⁵ Lee Yearley's *Aquinas and Mencius* includes an intriguing quote by James Legge comparing Butler with Mencius: "It can hardly be questioned in England that the palm for clear and just thinking belongs to Bishop Butler, but it will presently be seen that his views and those of Mencius are, as nearly as possible, identical. There is a difference of nomenclature and a combination of parts, in which the advantage is with the Christian prelate. Felicity of illustration and charm of style belong to the Chinese philosopher. The doctrine is the same in both." (1895, p. 57-58 in the introduction to Legge's translation of Mencius, see also the notes on p. 58-69). Yearley remarks, "We easily can be irritated by Legge granting to Mencius the cold conform of 'charm of style', but he is right to point to some striking resemblances. Differences also need to be noted, however, for example, the role of conscience in Butler and the relation of *jen* to other parts of the self in Mencius" (Yearley, 1991, p. 212).

⁴⁶For contemporary comparative works on the Christian and Confucian traditions, see the following: Julia Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity: a Comparative Study* (1977), Lee Yearley, *Mencius & Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage* (1990), Heup Young Kim, *Wang Yang-ming and Karl Barth: A Confucian – Christian Dialogue* (1996), and Aaron Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine* (2006).

A common theme in Butler's and Wang's moral vision is nature's innate design, and this order, they assert, did not come into existence by accident but through the purposeful will of a transcendent being. For the Christians, it is God the Creator who begets form from the formless.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." (Genesis 1:1-6)

In the Confucian account, the power on high that conceived the human domain is *Tien*, i.e., the Heavens.

"*Tien* gave birth to the people and set up rulers to superintend and shepherd them and see to it that they do not lose their true nature as human beings . . . *Tien's* love for the people is very great. Would it then allow one man [a wicked ruler] to preside over them in an arrogant and willful manner, indulging his excesses and casting aside the nature of Heaven and Earth allotted them? Sure it would not." (The *Tso chuan*, pp. xv-xvi, quoted in Debary and Bloom, 1999, p. 185)

Butler's God and Wang's *Tien* each denote the celestial being who has installed order in the terrestrial realm. Beyond the basic assumption of this being's existence, their descriptions of it bear distinguishing variations. To be sure, seminal and important scholarship has contrasted the Christian and Confucian theories of the transcendent.⁴⁷

One general thesis arising from these studies is that the Christian God has been given far more elaborate descriptions than the Confucians' sparing depiction of *Tien*. This disparity, I argue, is also noticeable when comparing Butler's and Wang's works.

To begin, the Christian deity is highly personalized, with diverse anthropomorphic traits, e.g., God is perceived at various times as a Heavenly Father, as a Judge who presides over human affairs, and as a shepherd tending to his flocks. Through

⁴⁷ See the following works for more detailed and extended analysis of these theories of the transcendent: Julia Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity: a Comparative Study* (1977),

the ages, Christians have spent considerable effort trying to decipher God's personality, some aspects of which are decidedly obscure, e.g., the Trinity. Indeed, Butler's main publication, the *Analogy*, represents one such effort. In the Preface, he expressed confidence that the Christian core beliefs can be verified reasonably.

“On the contrary, thus much, at last, will be here found, not taken for granted, but proved, that any reasonable man, who will thoroughly consider the matter, may be as much assured, as he is of his own being, that it is not, however, so clear a case, that there is nothing in it. There is, I think, strong evidence of its truth; but it is certain no one can, upon principles of reason, be satisfied of the contrary.” (Butler, 1990, V2, p. xviii)

While Butler is occupied with trying to grasp the often impenetrable sacred aura that envelops the divine, the same cannot be said of Wang. As with the Confucian tradition in general, Wang rarely ventures into speculation about *Tien's* specific personality. Not unexpectedly, this restraint leads to a plain and austere notion of the Confucian transcendent. *Tien*, for example, is commonly interpreted as the non-personal heaven, or simply sky. In fact, during Wang's time, *Tien* was viewed by the Neo-Confucians as simply an abstracted quality of *Li*, i.e., the Heavenly Principle.

“The Great Ultimate is merely the principle of heaven and earth and the myriad things . . . Before heaven and earth existed, there was assuredly this principle. It is the principle that ‘through movement generates the yang.’ It is also this principle that ‘through tranquility generates the yin.’” (Chu Hsi, in Chan, 1963, p. 638)

In the Confucian narrative, there is no equivalent of “God's voice” heard directly via Yahweh or Jesus Christ. *Tien's* dictates are normally conveyed indirectly through or presumed to be embedded in the sages' moral teachings. Butler's and Wang's specific descriptions (or lack thereof) of the transcendent cannot be more diverse. These differences notwithstanding, they share a fundamental assumption: nature and human

Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (1985), and David Hall and Roger Ames, *Thinking from the Confucius* (1987).

order are not the result of happenstance but are rather the manifested will of a divine power.

A2) *The Goal*

God and *Tien*, according to Butler and Wang, have brought existence into order with a stated purpose, i.e., *telos* and *Tao*, respectively. Are there similarities between the Christian *telos* and the Confucian *Tao*? And what are the differences in their renditions of humankind's assigned goals? For starters, I submit that Butler and Wang affirmed a common goal, i.e., the universal aspiration for the harmonious co-existence of all humanity. Chapter 2 showed that Butler's vision carries an overarching theme of unity. Building upon St. Paul's famous body metaphor (Romans 12:4-5), Butler expanded the family imagery onto all humankind, where all people, as God's children, are embraced as kindred and the Heavenly Father is the head of the household. In an address to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Butler called for missions to the natives on the basis of these familial ties.

“We are most strictly bound to consider these poor uninformed creatures, as being in all respects, of one family with ourselves, the family of mankind; and instruct them in our common salvation.” (Butler, 1990, V2, p. 66)

Admittedly, by today's standards Butler could do with a better choice of expression. Nevertheless, his main point should be recognized: we are all one family. And the human *telos* is to work towards the realization of this universal household. Wang's tradition (see Chapter 3) likewise espoused a unified vision. The *Tien* is depicted as advancing an all-encompassing *Tao*, i.e., the quest for the unity of all things. In the first instance, this is articulated as the *Tao* for all people to co-exist harmoniously. Classical Confucianism presented this in terms of the brotherhood of all people.

“Within the Four Seas all men are brothers.” (Analects 12:5)

Interestingly, Wang also appealed to a body metaphor, not unlike St Paul’s, to convey the notion of ideal human relationships in terms of a coordinated human form.

“There was no distinction between the self and the other, or between the self and things. It is like the body of a person. The eyes see, the ears hear, the hands hold, and the feet walk, all fulfilling the function of the body. The eyes are not ashamed of their not being able to hear. When the ears hear something, the eyes will direct their attention to it. The feet are not ashamed that they are not able to grasp. When a hand feels for something, the feet will move forward.” (Wang, 1985, p. 121)

While the aspiration for a common humanity is unmistakably clear in Wang’s *Tao* and Butler’s telos, there is one key difference. The Confucians espoused an even bigger ambition in that their quest extends beyond the human realm into the harmonious co-existence of all things. Wang and the Neo-Confucians asserted that *Tien’s* intent is for people to achieve holistic synchronization with everything, animate and inanimate.

“The innate knowledge of man is the same as that of plants and trees, tiles and stones. Without the innate knowledge inherent in man, there cannot be plants and trees, tiles and stones. This is not true of them only. Even Heaven and Earth cannot exist without the innate knowledge that is inherent in man. For at bottom Heaven, Earth, the myriad things, and man form one body.” (see Wang, 1985, p. 221)⁴⁸

For Wang, the *Tao* is to live in accord with one’s fellows and also with nature as an organic whole. Thus, it is clear that the expressed objectives in Wang’s vision exceeded those of Butler’s telos. Nevertheless, they do share an underlying goal, i.e., to bring to pass God and *Tien’s* desire for humankind to coexist harmoniously as one family.

A3) *The Process*

For Butler and Wang, God and *Tien* have set for humankind a telos and *Tao*, respectively. And the challenge at hand is to bring these goals to fruition. Their

conceptions of the unfolding of this process, I now show, contained remarkable differences.

A3.1) In The Beginning

In the first instance, Butler's Christian and Wang's Confucian accounts of this journey's origin cannot be more dissimilar. The Christian narrative opens dramatically in Eden, where Adam the first man sinned and humanity was thus cast into the wilderness. Humankind has since been on a recovery trek to the lost Eden. The Confucian story, by contrast, is sparing. Classical Confucianism alluded to an Eden-like past when the House of Chou (1122–256 BCE) became the historical moment in which the *Tao* was fully realized in the earthly realm, albeit temporarily. Since then, the *Tao* has eluded humanity and the human quest is to recapture its visitation.⁴⁹

A3.2) The Journey

Humankind, in Butler's and Wang's moral vision, is on a path to restore the lost ideal. In their explications of this process are two key features with intriguing variations. The first is the role of the transcendent. In the Christian model, God takes a highly personalized part, descending from heaven to intervene in the mundane, becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ to redeem humanity. In the *Analogy*, Butler recounts the divine intercession this way:

“Revelation teaches us . . . and that He hath mercifully provided, that there should be an interposition to prevent the destruction of human kind; whatever

⁴⁸ The Chinese terms of 'innate knowledge' is '*pen-chih*', man is '*ren*', and body' is '*ti*'.

⁴⁹ For more detailed comparison on this subject, see Julia Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity: a Comparative Study* (1977) and Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (1985).

that destruction unprevented would have been. ‘God so love the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth,’ not, to be sure, in a speculative, but in a practical sense, ‘that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish.’” (Butler, 1990, V2, p. 191)

To be sure, the Confucian *Tien* shows no less concern for human affairs, bestowing or withdrawing its Mandate on specific dynastic households. Here is one rendition of *Tien*’s intervention.

“Heaven, to protect the inferior people, made for them rulers, made for them teachers, that they may be able to assist the Lord-on-High, to secure the peace of the four quarters of the earth.” (from *The Chinese Classics*, quoted in Ching, 1977, p. 120)

Although it stayed engaged with the earthly domain, there is no equivalent manifestation of *Tien* as a historical persona. *Tien* dispenses its dictates remotely from the heavenly realm.

The second feature is humankind’s role. Upholding a sanguine view of human nature, Butler and Wang generally affirmed people’s positive role in the divine scheme. However, they also recognized divine appointment of select leaders. In the Confucian tradition, the ruling dynastic, as mandated by Heaven, provides the headship. For Christianity, God chose initially the Israelites and later included the Gentiles, i.e., Christians, to lead. Butler and Wang acknowledged that there are appointed leaders, but differences are discernable in their definitions of these groups. On the one hand, Wang’s is a narrowly focused unit, i.e., an imperial household, whereas Butler’s encompasses a wider grouping, i.e., people designated as Christians. On the other hand, Butler’s leaders are defined tightly, i.e., only Christians assume headship. By contrast, Wang’s has no fixed identity, i.e., leadership is not assigned to any particular dynasty, people, or even faith (in section B1.1, I will examine further this distinction).

A3.3) The End

Finally, Butler's and Wang's anticipation (or lack thereof) of how the quest for the lost ideal would draw to a close also reveals telling differences. Based on prophetic oracles, Christians foresee a climactic eschatological finale to this journey, culminating with the second coming of Jesus Christ. At that time, a judgment day will be convened whereupon each person will account for his or her life before God, and Butler warns that all will be rewarded and punished accordingly.

“And thus the whole analogy of Nature, the whole present course of things, most fully shews, that there is nothing incredible in the general doctrine of religion, that God will reward and punish men for their actions hereafter: nothing incredible, I mean, arising out of the notion of rewarding and punishing.” (Butler, 1990, V2, p. 39)

By contrast, Wang, and for that matter the Confucian tradition as a whole, offers no opinions speculative or otherwise on the probable conclusion to the journey. They are all but mute on how the search would end historically. To conclude, I thus submit that there are vivid variations in Butler's and Wang's perceptions of how the telos and *Tao* started and how it would end. Yet there is a basic shared understanding: humankind is on a quest to fulfill the transcendent's desire for all to coexist harmoniously as one family.

B) Moral Self

In the sacred drama, God and *Tien* take the undisputable leads, yet Butler and Wang also asserted humankind's central role. The outworking of the telos and *Tao* is as much heaven's handiwork as it is dependent on the purposeful cooperation of the mundane, i.e., a joint divine-human endeavor. To that end, people need to be equipped

for this sacrosanct task. And for Butler and Wang, it is the ideal self, i.e., the Christian and *Chun Tzu*, respectively, who is best placed to actualize the telos and *Tao*.

B1) The Human Individual

The human person, in Butler's and Wang's views, is endowed with innate potential. Embedded in this sanguine understanding of human nature are two important themes: an egalitarian outlook and the doctrine of dignity.

B1.1) Equality of All

In the first instance, Butler's and Wang's optimistic outlook advances a vision where all people possess a potential role in the divine plan. Wang alludes to this in his commentary on the learning needed to realize the *Tao*:

“This knowledge is inherent in the human mind whether that of the sage or of the stupid person, for it is the same for the whole world and for all ages.” (Wang, 1985, p. 167)

What is necessary to participate in the *Tao*, Wang claims, is available and accessible to all. Therefore,

“If gentlemen of the world merely devote their effort to extending their innate knowledge they will naturally share with all a universal sense of right and wrong, share their likes and dislikes, regard other people as their own persons, regard the people of other countries as their own family, and look upon Heaven, Earth, and all things as one body.” (Wang, 1985, p. 167)

All people have the potential to become a *Chun Tzu* and be an active player in the divine drama. Likewise in Butler we see a similar expression. In a sermon titled “Upon Human Nature,” he chose Romans 2:14 as the opening verse to explicate his understanding of the human person.

“For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves.” (Butler, 1990, V1, p. 40)

The Gentiles, without the Mosaic law, are yet capable of discerning and acting on God’s natural law. In subsequent commentaries, Butler explains that all people, Christians and Gentiles alike, by virtue of the universal access to the law of nature, can become a part of the divine order.

The above exegesis reveals Wang and Butler’s affirmation of an egalitarian viewpoint. However, examination of other texts reveals some qualifications. They employ criteria, e.g., their differentiation of people’s capabilities and statuses in the divine scheme, that appear to be at odds with the egalitarian assumptions.

Butler’s views are based initially on the natural law doctrine, which by virtue of its universal accessibility allows all people to participate in the divine plan. But there is for him also the additional Special Revelation (henceforth “SR”) that is disclosed only to some, i.e., Christians (and people of the Book). This privilege puts them in an advantageous position to comprehend God’s intentions. In the following, Butler explains the benefits of SR in terms of its elucidation of natural religion.

“And in proportion as Christianity is professed and taught in the world, Religion, natural or essential Religion, is thus distinctively and advantageously laid before mankind, and brought again and again to their thoughts, as a matter of infinite importance.” (Butler, 1990, V2, p. 143)

The utility of Christianity, Butler then bemoans, is not always comprehended.

“The benefit arising from this supernatural assistance, which Christianity affords to natural Religion, is what some persons are very slow in apprehending.” (Butler, 1990, V2, p. 143)

God's SR, for Butler, gives the Christian a definite edge. While all people are naturally capable of comprehending God's design, SR enables some to better act on it. Therefore in Butler's worldview, people are divided into two groups, Christians (or people of the Book) and non-Christians, with the former having an upper hand over the latter in comprehending the divine.

Wang's outlook also categorizes people into groups with different attributes. Here we see him positing some as having distinct traits over others.

“In the matter of purity and impurity of physical nature, some men are above average and some are below. With reference to the Sage's doctrines, some are born with the knowledge of them and can practice them naturally and easily, while others learn them through study and practice them for their advantage.” (Wang, 1985, p. 61)

According to Wang, people are born with varied aptitudes and in light of this they have to work with different intensities and paces.

“Those below average must make one hundred efforts where others make one, and one thousand efforts where others make ten.” (Wang, 1985, p. 61)

In Wang's view some may need to toil harder than others to achieve the *Tao*. On this account, Wang is similar to Butler in claiming that certain people are in an advantageous position compared to the rest in the divine scheme of things.

The classifications in Butler and in Wang's works appear to contradict the “all men are equal” principle. Are the views of Butler and of Wang in fact non-egalitarian? Their acknowledgment that some people have distinctive advantages over others warrants a reexamination of the assumption of equality. I argue that Butler and Wang do maintain a particular form of egalitarianism, one that requires a nuanced distinction between “equal capability or advantage” and “equal potential.”

Continuing with the last quotation, upon registering the fact that people are endowed with different capabilities and some have to work harder than others, Wang then draws this conclusion.

“But the success of all of them is the same.” (Wang, 1985, p. 61)

This is a critical deduction. Here Wang is saying that though talents are distributed unevenly, all people, if they are willing to strive for it, can attain the Sage’s learning.

In another passage, he reasserts the same point more plainly.

“Therefore, even an ordinary person who is willing to learn to have his mind become completely one with heavenly virtue can also become a sage, just as a piece of gold weighing one tael is inferior in quantity but not necessarily in quality, to another piece weighing 10,000 yi . . . This is why we say, ‘Every man can become Yao and Shun.’” (Wang, 1985, p. 61)

In Wang’s view, though people are marked with unequal advantages, i.e., some need to invest more effort, all retain the same potential to be part of the *Tao*.⁵⁰ In this regard, he maintains the equality principle in that all hold the possibility, regardless of capability, to be part of the divine plans.

Butler’s Christianity, I submit, also affirms this form of egalitarianism. In the first instance, we see him envisioning the Christian mission in all-inclusive terms.

“Christianity is very particular to be considered as a trust, deposited with us in behalf of others, in behalf of mankind, as well as for our own instruction.” (Butler, 1990, V1, p. 209)

While the aim is to serve the whole of humankind, the means to achieve this is seemingly exclusive, i.e., the Christian possesses a distinctive privilege. Nevertheless, Butler’s model remains egalitarian in a crucial way: every person can become a Christian because Christian beliefs are comprehensible to all.

“The general proof of natural religion and of Christianity does, I think, lie level to common men.” (Butler, 1990, V2, p. 217)

If presented with the Gospel, all people have the capacity to grasp the SR. Therefore, while the SR is exclusive, every person is eligible to be a Christian and acquire the SR’s benefits. In this sense, the egalitarian principle is maintained. While some disadvantages exist for some people, all have the potential to overcome them by embracing Christianity.

I thus submit that for Butler and Wang, regardless of the uneven capabilities or advantages, every single person retains the potential to be part of the divine plan. All can work to develop their abilities and overcome their disadvantages to attain the sacred goal. While Butler and Wang hold this general outlook, there remains one critical difference pertaining to the ease of access, i.e., which tradition is more open to all?

The issue at the outset relates to confessional allegiance. Does one need to embrace a specific creed to become a Christian or *Chun Tzu*? The Christian case is clear; to be one a person must embrace an exclusive set of beliefs containing the unique SR. By contrast, the requirements to be a *Chun Tzu* seem more loosely defined. The criteria Wang employs, to use Butler’s term, are based on natural religion. All can be a *Chun Tzu* by staying true to their innate nature. We see his plea for the ideal moral individual framed in these general terms:

“Now if I can really find help and assistance from eminent men and like-minded friends and together with them make the doctrine of innate knowledge clearly prevail in the world, so that all people can know how to extend their own innate knowledge, give security and support to one another, eliminate their obscuration and selfishness, wipe out their habits of slander, jealousy, rivalry, and anger, and bring about the world of great unity, then my insanity will be cured in a sudden release and I can finally avoid the disaster of losing my mind. Will that not be a joy!” (Wang, 1985, p. 171)

⁵⁰ This is a variation of Confucius’ own perception: “By nature men are alike but through practice they have become far apart.” (Analects 17:2)

For Wang the eminent individuals are those who bring their innate knowledge to full bloom. That is all that is required, with no particular religious articles of faith demanded. This overview shows that Butler and Wang use dissimilar criteria to define the Christian and *Chun Tzu*. This in turn allows us to make two further observations on the differences between the two thinkers.

The first pertains to the inclusive-exclusive distinction. Wang's notion of the ideal self, I submit, is more inclusive than Butler's. For Wang, regardless of confessional creed, a person is qualified to be a *Chun Tzu* if he conforms to the natural law. Indeed, "*Chun Tzu*" has been translated simply as "noble gentleman." It is conceivable that the Confucian would assign the title noble gentleman/*Chun Tzu* to a Christian or to a member of another faith tradition if that person exhibited natural virtues. In Chapter 2, I showed that Butler accepts natural religion's role as "sufficient" and would consider anyone who possesses natural virtues as morally adequate. For Butler, though, Christianity remains the preferred tradition and Christians are best placed to discern God's design. Observing merely the natural standards is passable but not superior. Ideally, all should aspire to be a Christian. And the Christian criteria as discussed are specific; one needs to embrace a unique creed to be a Christian. On this account, I submit that Butler's model is more exclusive than Wang's.

The second observation relates to the accessibility question. Is the possibility of becoming a Christian or *Chun Tzu* equally open to everyone? For Wang, notwithstanding confessional creeds, all can qualify as a *Chun Tzu* if they conform to the moral law in nature. And indeed the key resource necessary to become a *Chun Tzu* is readily available

to all, i.e., natural religion. Not so with Butler. While all can become a Christian, the SR that is needed to become one is not universally accessible. Its historically preferential disclosure has rendered to some lesser accessibility to the Gospel. Why the SR is revealed to only some specific people has perplexed many, Butler included (see Butler, 1990, V2, p. 177-184). Notwithstanding his bafflement, Butler did see in the church a critical mission, to take the unique Christian message to all corners of the world.

In summary, Butler and Wang both held a sanguine view of human nature. While they affirmed universal potential, they also recognized that people had different capacities and advantages and for this reason they may have to take diverse paths toward realizing the telos and *Tao*.

B1.2) Human Dignity

In the visions of Butler and of Wang, the human person not only has a role in the transcendent plan but also embodies the divine. The sacred emblem is suggested in Wang's declaration of the *Tien*, *Tao*, and human *hsin* as one.

“If one knows how to search for the *Tao* inside the *hsin* and to see the substance of one's own mind, then there is no place nor time where the *Tao* is not to be found. It pervades the past and present and is without beginning or end . . . The *hsin* is the *Tao*, and the *Tao* is *Tien*. If one knows the *hsin*, he knows both the *Tao* and *Tien*.” (Wang, 1985, p. 47)

The depiction of *Tien*, *Tao*, and *hsin* as intertwined, I submit, signifies the Confucian view of humankind's divine attributes. One sees similar enunciations in Butler. In an extended discourse on human nature, he offers this summation suggesting the presence of the sacred in the self:

“ . . . but that from his make, constitution, or nature, he is in the strictest and most proper sense a law to himself. He has the rule of right within: what is wanting is only that he honestly attend to it.” (Butler, 1990, V1, p. 57)

Butler’s assertion of the “rule of right” residing in humans, commonly understood as the natural law, conveys the impression of humankind as the depository of divine decrees. Wang’s equating of *Tao* with *hsin* and Butler’s imputation of natural law on the human moral anatomy reinforce the view of humankind as an embodiment of the divine.

As a host to the sacred, with the divine law inscribed upon her basic form to govern her conduct, the human person is often visualized as wholly integrated with the transcendent order. Such a portrayal inevitably conjures up the imagery of automated human beings, i.e., mere puppets scripted to a divine drama. In Chapter 2, I showed that Butler rejected such a proposition. The human person, he asserts, is not a mechanical part, as in a watch, but a creature with autonomy and free will (Butler, 1990, V2, p. 8). For Butler, the individual is a creative agent in the divine plan and not a mere mechanized part.

The autonomy issue is not addressed directly by Wang; nevertheless, there are auxiliary arguments to support his affirmation of moral agency. In the first instance, contemporary scholarship has generally recognized Wang’s invocation of *liang-chih* as promoting a more robust Confucian self.⁵¹ By elevating *liang-chih* as the ultimate authority, Wang extols greater self-reliance, i.e., heeding one’s *liang-chih* as the main source of guidance. This in turn redefines a person’s social identity, accentuating the

⁵¹ See Philip Ivanhoe’s *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mencius and Wang Yang-ming* (1990) and Julia Ching’s *To Acquire Wisdom: The Way of Wang Yang-ming* (1976).

individual's primacy vis-à-vis the collective order (section B2.2.3 will explore further this thesis).

While Wang's contribution strengthens individual independence at the mundane level, the basic question remains, is the human person a mere pawn in the broader Heavenly scheme? Recent scholarship has made both important and contentious contributions to this subject. Herbert Fingarette's *Confucius—The Secular as Sacred* (1972) presented an influential argument rejecting the notion of inferred autonomy in the Confucian self. Tu Wei Ming's *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creature Transformation* (1980) countered that the Confucian self is to be understood as a creative agent operating within the dynamic tension of *li* and *jen*. It is beyond this dissertation's scope to dwell in depth on this complicated debate; however, based on facets of Wang's work, I submit that there is convincing evidence to second Tu's position. For instance, as discussed earlier, Wang's invocation of *liang-chih* has given the Confucian self a more robust social identity. In other statements, Wang also asserts *hsin*'s indispensability to the outworking of *Tien's Tao*, strongly implying human creativity. Here is one such declaration:

“The innate knowledge of man is the same as that of plants and trees, tiles and stone. Without the innate knowledge inherent in man, there cannot be plants and trees, tiles and stones. This is not true of them only. Even Heaven and Earth cannot exist without the innate knowledge that is inherent in man. For at bottom, Heaven and Earth, the myriad of things, and man form one body” (Wang, 1985, p. 222).

Wang and the Confucians in general, I believe, do possess a notion of the self as an agent with a purposeful role in the divine narrative.

The autonomy theory together with the divine embodiment idea leads to another key doctrine, i.e., human dignity. This is a basic Christian dogma founded on the belief that humankind is created “in God’s image” and is thus infused with a certain “divinity” and for this reason merits a dignified regard. Admittedly, “dignity” is not a typical Confucian term, yet the idea, I argue, is not antithetical to Wang’s outlook. After all, the Confucians, like the Christians, see the aura of *Tien* and *Tao* imbued in humanity (see Wang, 1985, p. 47). In this sense, the human person does bear a measure of “sacredness” that deserves reverence. Therefore, Wang, like Butler, does affirm human dignity.⁵²

The dignity doctrine has obvious practical implications, most broadly the requirement to treat each person with due respect. Suffice it to say that what constitutes dignified regard is complex and contentious. And indeed differences are noticeable in Butler’s and Wang’s treatments of this principle. My comparison at this point will be limited to a general survey of its political application, namely, the 18th century English Parliament and 16th century Ming Court’s efforts (or lack thereof) to protect human dignity. During Butler’s time, the dignity doctrine was the catalyst for the shaping of a landmark rights theory to protect individual liberty. The doctrine and theory were then backed up by the power of the law when Parliament passed the monumental 1677 Bill of Rights. By contrast, we see no equivalent development in the Ming era. To be sure, Wang is no less concerned for human dignity and affirmed people’s entitlement to private views.

⁵² Discussions on Chinese notion of human dignity are centered on a cluster of terms, i.e. *hsin*, *jen*, *li*. The debate is primary over whether the Chinese individual possesses moral autonomy vis-à-vis the collective order. For more in-depth research on human dignity please see: Irene Bloom’s “Mencius’ Arguments on Human Nature.” (1994) “Confucian Perspectives on the Individual and the Collectivity” (1996), and “Human Nature and Biological Nature in Mencius” (1997). David Hall and Roger Ames’, “Thinking from the Confucius” (1987) and “The Democracy of the Dead” (1999).

Yet there is no corresponding rights formulation or law legislated to defend individual freedom (section B2.2.3 will explore this more extensively). In sum, Butler and Wang share a robust notion of the self but in Butler's England we see a more extended effort to support this moral affirmation with legislative measures.

B2) Moral Anatomy

Moral deliberations in the framework of Butler and Wang entail two distinct sequences employing corresponding faculties. The first involves reason and sense, which engage in the primary discernment; then, as necessary, conscience becomes activated to provide subsequent oversight.

B2.1) The Basic Faculties

In the first instance, Butler's and Wang's formal introductions of the key faculties cannot be more dissimilar. For Butler, these are the "principle of self-love and benevolence" and "several passions and affections," while for Wang it is *hsin*, an umbrella concept for four separate terms, i.e., *chih* and *yi*, *li* and *jen*. These diverse terminologies largely reflect Butler's and Wang's distinct diagnoses of moral challenges. Notwithstanding these variously named faculties, I intend to begin with the argument that Butler and Wang do share a common affirmation, i.e., reason and sense as moral guide.

B2.1.1) Reason and Sense

Without question, – "the principle of self-love and benevolence" (henceforth referred to as principle) and "the particular passion and affection" (henceforth referred to as passion) are Butler's uniquely defined faculties. Chapter 2 shows that he also appealed

to and often framed the moral dilemma in terms of reason and sense. For instance, one of his recurring refrains was to plead for balanced regard for both rationality and moral sensibility. Butler often used principle and reason interchangeably. His understanding of passion, I argue, may be interpreted broadly as sense. I thus submit that the specific faculties of principle and passion may be understood as derivatives of the larger reason-sense dialectic. The variously named faculties notwithstanding, Butler recognized reason and sense as moral guides.

The Confucian *hsin* represents two pairs of terms: *li* and *jen*, *chih* and *yi*. Modern scholarship has commonly interpreted *li* and *jen* as rituals and benevolence and *chih* and *yi* as reason and sense, respectively.⁵³ Chapter 3 showed that Wang's concern was primarily set in terms of the *li* and *jen* dialectic. He framed the key task as ensuring that external forms are conducted with appropriate internal spirit. This is achieved through the delicate interaction of *chih* and *yi*, i.e., reason and sense. *Chi* may be understood as the mind providing guidance in relation to the external *li*, and *yi* as quickening the heart as it pertains to the internal *jen*. The Confucian umbrella term *hsin*, which at times has been translated as "heart and mind" embraces basic moral functions akin to reason and sense. In summation, Butler and Wang advanced very differently named faculties, yet I argue that they held a common recognition of reason and sense as sources of discernment.

B2.1.2) Specific Concerns

⁵³ To translate the Confucian terms *chih* and *yi* as reason and sense is not an exercise without contention. Reason and sense were used to explain various Confucian terms; for example, *jen* is at times associated with sense. For more on this debate, see Irene Bloom's "Mencius' Arguments on Human Nature" (1994) and "Human Nature and Biological Nature in Mencius" (1997) and also David Hall and Roger Ames' *Thinking from the Confucius* (1987).

Butler's and Wang's choices of terms offer insights into their specific concerns and how they rank the challenges they faced. Butler's selection of "the principle of self-love and benevolence" and "the particular passion and affection" as the main faculties is revealing, especially with the juxtaposition of self-love and benevolence. This, I submit, is indicative of his key pastoral concern, i.e., the ills of egoism. He registered his wariness over inordinate self-interest early, in the Preface to his Fifteen Sermons.

"The thing to be lamented is, not that men have so great regard to their own good or interest in the present world, for they have not enough; but that they have so little to the good of others." (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 19)

It is fair to surmise that Hobbes was in Butler's mind when he coined those faculties' names. By invoking these specially designated terms, he sought to draw attention to what he believed was the preeminent moral dilemma, i.e., self-partiality.

Wang's *hsin* suggests a different concern, namely *cheng* (sincerity). As discussed, the *li* and *jen* dialectic takes center stage in the Confucian moral lexicon. It reflects Wang's main occupation, i.e., to match exterior actions with appropriate interior spirit. Here we see another of Wang's recurring criticisms, leveled against what he perceived as hollow morality.

"Outwardly people make pretenses in the name of humanity and righteousness. At heart their real aim is to act for their own interest." (Wang, 1985, p. 168)

Wang and the Confucians in general, I contend, were deeply bothered by the malice of insincerity and wanted to ensure that outer forms were the product of the correct inner motives.

Their diverse terms indicate Butler's and Wang's differing assessments of what constituted the most serious moral challenges at hand. They were, to be sure, not

indifferent nor oblivious to other vices. Indeed, Butler's sermons on hypocrisy and self-deceit clearly attest to his express concern with inner motivation (Butler, 1990, VI, p. 125-136). Likewise, Wang's criticisms of Mohism testify to his ongoing wariness about the ills of egoism. Butler and Wang do recognize and respond to a broader range of moral problems, yet their specifically named faculties do denote how they ranked and prioritized both their moral adversaries and their moral efforts. For Butler, selfishness is the most insidious evil, while insincerity was the more pressing concern for Wang and needed to be attended to accordingly (section B3.2 will further contrast Butler's and Wang's diagnoses of selfishness and insincerity).

B2.1.3) Historical Perspectives: Reason versus Sense

The debate over reason and sense has a long and checkered history. In their respective contexts, Butler and Wang confronted and in turn were challenged by their counterparts on these faculties' precise roles. A comparative review of these contentions reveals intriguing parallels in Butler's and Wang's depictions and reactions to their opponents' positions.

Chapter 2 presented Butler's criticism of the Deists and Methodists; he charged the former with relying too much on the rational and rebuked the latter for failing to check unrestrained enthusiasm. Likewise, Chapter 3 presented Wang's reaction to Chu Hsi and the Buddhists, accusing the former of rigid formality to the detriment of *jen* and reproaching the latter for excessive sentimentalism to the neglect of social responsibility. In these critiques, we see a shared outline in Butler's and Wang's concerns, namely, an effort to ensure that their moral opponents maintained a well-balanced treatment of the

competing influences of rationality and moral sensibility. They employed a general scale with reason and sense at opposing ends. Traditions were then assessed and placed along the spectrum based on their success or failure at moderating reason and sense's powers.

While critical of others for failing to maintain equipoise, Butler's and Wang's own positions, intentionally or inadvertently, were not exactly evenhanded either. Chapter 2 showed that Butler by design accorded reason a higher position than sense. Indeed, scholarship on 18th century English moral thought has mostly placed Butler in the rational school.⁵⁴ Wang offered no explicit declaration of his position on this matter. However, thinkers both during his time and in modern times have aligned him with the "sense" school. This is in large part due to Wang's presumed close affinity to the Buddhist traditions and his overt criticism of Chu Hsi, who is known principally as the founder of the Neo-Confucian rational school.⁵⁵

B2.2) Conscience

For Butler and Wang, reason and sense, defined broadly, provide the first guidance. And when these err, conscience or *liang-chih* becomes activated to provide the individual with a self-correcting capability. According to many interpreters, Butler's and Wang's explications of conscience (which henceforth may be taken to include *liang-chih*) represent their most distinctive contributions to the Christian and Confucian

⁵⁴ See J.B. Schneewind's "Joseph Butler," in *Moral Philosophy from Montaigne to Kant* (1998).

⁵⁵ See Chan Wing-tsit's *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (1963) and Fung Yu-Lan's *History of Chinese Philosophy Vol II*. (1953)

understandings of the moral self.⁵⁶ My comparative study on conscience will be presented in three sections: conscience's descriptions and functions, its authority and power, and the historical significance.

B2.2.1) Descriptions and Functions

To begin, Butler and Wang employed a broad range of metaphors to describe conscience. Wang liked to compare *liang-chih* to a mirror:

“The substance of his *liang-chih* is as clear as a bright mirror without any slight obscuration. Whether a beautiful or an ugly object appears, it reflects it as it comes, without anything being left behind on the bright mirror itself.” (Wang, 1985, p. 148)

As a mirror, *liang-chih* is truly revealing; it reflects exactly and conceals nothing.

“If you see this little thing (*liang-chih*) clearly, no matter how much and how eloquently one may talk, all right and wrong, sincerity and insincerity in what he says are manifested right in front of it. What is in accord with it is right and what is not in accord with it is wrong. It is like what the Buddhists call the ‘spiritual seal’. It is truly a gold-testing stone and a compass.” (Wang, 1985, p. 194)

For Wang, *liang-chih* also resembles a compass providing the benchmark for right or wrong.

In Butler's case, the imagery of choice for conscience is light, e.g., the “candle of the Lord within” (Butler, 1990, V1, p. 136). At times, he portrays conscience with the anthropomorphic traits of a ruling judge:

“Conscience . . . which without being consulted, without being advised with, magisterially asserts itself, and approves or condemns him the doer of them accordingly.” (Butler, 1990, V1, p. 45)

The above shows that Butler and Wang utilized diverse similes to describe conscience.

Notwithstanding these diversities, they share a common notion of its basic function,

⁵⁶ The following works on Butler and Wang have in various ways recognized conscience as their primary contribution to moral philosophical theories: see Ivanhoe 1990, Ching 1976, Tu 1971 and

namely, to perform introspective self-examination. In the first instance, I showed that they perceived conscience as operating like a moral reflex. It reacts to presumed errors to avert impending mistakes and to provide judicial oversight, convicting a person of wrongs committed (see Chapter 2 section C2 and Chapter 3). In addition, Butler and Wang depicted conscience as inducing a soliloquy-like phenomena. It stirs within the person an internal dialogue, an inner tussle between the self and his or her conscience, over what is right or wrong (see Chapter 2 section C2 and Chapter 3).

B2.2.2) Authority and Power

Butler and Wang share a common conception of conscience's basic functions. Furthermore, they both assert conscience's supreme authority. For them, conscience's pronouncements are definitive, bearing the force of moral imperatives and absolutely binding on the person. According to Butler,

“Conscience . . . compared with the rest as they all stand together in the nature of man, plainly bears upon it marks of authority over all the rest, and claims that absolute direction of them all, to allow or forbid their gratification.” (Butler, 1990, VI, p. 10)

As for *liang-chih*, in this assertion Wang seems to believe that its power equals or even surpasses that of Heaven:

“It may precede Heaven and Heaven does not act in opposition to it . . . If even Heaven does not oppose it, how much less will man and how much less will spiritual being?” (Wang, 1985, p. 156)

Butler's and Wang's reverence for conscience is unmistakable. Even so there are some nuances in how they enunciate conscience's authority and power. Three sets of differences will be examined.

First, they reference conscience's authority in different ways. Butler locates conscience at the apex of a tripartite order, i.e., presiding over the principle of self-love and benevolence and several passions and affections. In Wang's case, *liang-chih* is described simply as the overseer of human conduct and at times more specifically as the moderating authority on the *li* and *jen* dialectic. As discussed in section B2.1.2, these arrangements reflect Butler's and Wang's different rankings of moral challenges. For Butler, Hobbesian egoism is the chief nemesis and conscience is set up as the safeguard against unbridled self-interest. In Wang's situation, insincerity is the key concern; consequently, *liang-chih* is commonly invoked to expose pretenses.

Second, Butler and Wang envisage conscience's power differently. The former sees conscience's oversight as all-encompassing, not a mere first aid kit providing a patchwork moral remedy. Conscience's influence, Butler asserts, goes beyond the incidental, i.e., it is the very "guide of life" (Butler, 1990, V1, p. 136). And he exhorts all to "bring our whole conduct before this superior faculty" (Butler, 1990, V1, p. 11). Without question, Wang in like manner perceives *liang-chih's* supervision as embracing a person's whole being. However, he also accorded *liang-chih* a much wider sphere of influence, exceeding the human realm and extending into the natural world at large.

"This *liang-chih* of man is the same as that of plants and trees, tiles and stones. Without the *liang-chih* inherent in man, there cannot be plants and trees, tiles and stone. This is not true of them only. Even Heaven and Earth cannot exist without the *liang-chih* that is inherent in man." (Wang, 1985, p. 221)

Wang's perception of *liang-chih's* power is indeed quite extraordinary.

"*Liang-chih* is the spirit of creation. The spirit produces heaven and earth, spiritual beings, and the Lord. They all come from it. Truly nothing can be equal to this. If people can recover in its totality without the least deficiency, they will surely be gesticulating with hands and feet. I don't know if there is anything in the world happier than this." (Wang, 1985, p. 148)

To be sure Butler acknowledges conscience's unique transformative force, yet he does not ascribe to it a scope and range of power comparable to what Wang claimed for *liang-chih*.

Third, while conscience's authority is affirmed, Butler and Wang yet concede its constraints. They recognize that conscience's pronouncements may still be overlooked and ignored. There are some nuances in their specific evaluations of conscience's limitations. In general, Butler expressed these in terms of conscience's inadequate strength to enforce its authority (see Chapter 2 section F). As for Wang, he alludes to *liang-chih's* constraints in the broader context of human frailty, equating it with a person's susceptibility to disregarding *hsin's* directions (see Chapter 3 section F). Section B3 will contrast further Butler's and Wang's diagnoses of conscience's weaknesses in particular and human fallibility more generally.

B2.2.3) Historical Significance

The historical contexts in which Butler and Wang expounded on conscience offer some intriguing comparative perspectives. My comparison will be presented from two perspectives: conceptual significance and the corresponding political implications.

Butler's and Wang's works are recognized as signature treatises on conscience and key enunciations of the Christian and Confucian notions of the self. Nevertheless, I show that there is a relative difference in the weighted impacts of their contributions. That is to say, Wang's effect on the Confucian tradition, in my opinion, represents a far greater breakthrough than what Butler's view contributed to the Christian tradition.

The difference is first noted with regard to their expositions on conscience. In Butler's tradition, conscience holds a revered position with a deep-rooted past. This dates from the early church, with St. Paul's depiction of the raging moral angst within the self, to Thomas Aquinas' masterpieces on conscience and Luther's invocation of conscience as a political act of rebellion.⁵⁷ There is no doubt that Butler's work on conscience is critically acclaimed, yet when viewed in the context of the scholarship that preceded it, his is one among other contributions to an established body of accomplished works. By contrast, Wang's work was groundbreaking. For starters, the term *liang-chih* was newly coined by him. And his explication of its function was also novel in an important way. To be sure the Confucian tradition always assumed that the self possessed an innate faculty, i.e., *hsin*. However, the ability for internal oversight, specifically in terms of the introspective and retrospective aspects, was never expounded explicitly. For example, Mencius' *hsin* was used interchangeably for both initial reflection and subsequent oversight. These two operations were not differentiated clearly until Wang advanced the term *liang-chih* as distinct from the generic *hsin*. It was Wang's rendition of *liang-chih*, I submit, that more lucidly conveyed the inner capability commonly understood as the function of conscience.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Butler's exposé on conscience follows a long historical lineage, i.e., St. Paul, Thomas Aquinas, and Martin Luther. See Timothy Pott's *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy* (1980) for a comprehensive historical survey of the Western and Christian conceptions of conscience. Scholarship generally placed Butler's contribution as presenting a more 'reason' based interpretation of conscience. See C. D. Broad (1971), E. C. Mossner (1936), and J.B. Schneewind (1998).

⁵⁸ Wang's *liang-chih* has been compared to *hsin*, *chi*, etc. It serves as the catalyst for a more robust notion of the individual. See Julia Ching's *To Acquire Wisdom: The Way of Wang Yang-ming* (1976).

The second difference pertains to Butler's and Wang's conceptions of the self. As previously discussed, their invocation of conscience redefined the relationship between the individual and the collective. Butler's work on conscience and his thoughts on personal liberty contributed to the English a more vigorous sense of the self. However, his effort was set within the context of those of many other significant figures, including Locke, who initiated the theory of rights. In comparison, Wang's more robust notion of the self is quite novel during the 16th century Ming era. By appealing to *liang-chih*, he in fact challenged the status quo, urging individuals to give one's inner conviction priority over external conventions. Wang has been equated with Luther in his revolutionary streak. And for these radical declarations, Wang paid the price and was accused of being a Buddhist and of fueling anarchy. Wang's assertion of the self, I submit, bore more impact on 16th century Ming China than Butler's did in early 18th century England.⁵⁹

The above discussion leads to the next point of comparison, the political implications of Butler's and Wang's bolder notion of the self. As discussed in section B1.2, this notion of the robust self has relevance to the understanding of human dignity and liberty. And as mentioned earlier, Butler's 18th century England initiated a more comprehensive legislative effort to address these issues than did Wang's Ming era China. I will now elaborate further.

In 1689, England's Parliament passed a monumental piece of legislation called the Bill of Rights. At base, it redefined the relationship between the monarch and his subjects, declaring that all Englishmen possessed certain immutable civil and political rights. These include, among others, freedom to petition the monarch, freedom of speech,

⁵⁹ See Prall (1993) and Rupp (1986) for more analysis of 17th century English legal developments.

freedom of press, and freedom from cruel and unusual punishment. The bill's overall effect was to empower the individual and, by the power of the written law, grant them protection against the monarchy's capricious interference in his subjects' affairs.

Scholarship has by and large recognized the 1689 Bill of Rights as the precursor to the United States Constitution and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In the 16th century Ming Dynasty, and for that matter in much of China's pre-modern history, we see no equivalent development in terms of individual rights protection. To be sure Wang's work advanced a more rigorous Confucian assertion of the self. And without doubt the Chinese dynasties possessed a tradition of written laws, e.g., the Tang Code of 624 CE. However, there is no known equivalent legislation to protect the individual vis-à-vis the Emperor. To the extent that a person could gain access to a hearing in the Imperial Courts, he did so with the full knowledge that the Sovereign's judgment was absolute. And there was ultimately no recourse or protection of any sort, even in the face of Imperial whims of the most ruthless form.⁶⁰

B3) Human Frailty

While imbued with an innate moral capability, humankind remains vulnerable to errors. Butler and Wang conceded that conscience's dictates could yet be ignored and warned that rebelling against one's inner guide would weaken the moral self and undermine the collective order. In the following lamentation, we see Wang blaming the obstruction of *liang-chih* for the widespread mischief seen among the people.

⁶⁰ See Perenboom (1993) and Tong (1991) for more analysis on the Chinese legal tradition.

“In later generations the doctrine of *liang-chih* has not clearly prevailed. People have used their selfishness and cunning to compete and rival one another. Consequently each one has his own opinion, and one-sided, trivial, perverse, and narrow views as well as dishonest, crafty, underhanded, and evil tricks have become innumerable.” (Wang, 1985, p. 167-8)

Likewise, in a charge delivered to his fellow clergy at Durham, Butler decried the general malaise that had befallen his countrymen.

“It is impossible for me, my brethren, upon our first meeting of this kind, to forbear lamenting with you the general decay of religion in this nation . . . But the number of those who do, and who profess themselves unbelievers, increases, and with their numbers their zeal.” (Butler, 1990, V2, p. 287)

The risks and perils of moral waywardness were not lost on Butler and Wang. Indeed, their diagnoses of the challenges contain some noteworthy contrasts.

B3.1) Misguided and Weakened Self

In Butler’s and Wang’s works, one discerns their acute awareness of how a person’s moral health can deteriorate into a perilous state. And they used the harshest adjectives and similes to describe these conditions. Humankind, Wang surmised, is capable of descending into a vulgarized existence.

“Thus people degenerated to the status of animals and barbarians, and even despotism itself could no longer operate.” (Wang, 1985, p. 121)

Butler is no less sparing in depicting human depravity. Here he offers a grim account of Balaam’s morally impoverished state:

“A very wicked man, under a deep sense of God and religion, persisting still in his wickedness, and preferring the wages of unrighteousness, even when he had before him a livery view of death, and that approaching periods of his days.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 98)

Beyond these dismal portrayals, the two thinkers also advanced a more pointed argument, addressing the human capacity to render sound judgments. They warned that neglect could lead to serious impairment of people’s basic moral perception. In a degenerated

person, according to Wang, the ability to distinguish right from wrong may become mixed up.

“For instance, although in an instant of thought I know that I should love good and hate evil, yet unconsciously the thought gets mixed and impure. As soon as it is mixed and impure, the mind is no longer that which loves good as it loves beautiful colors and hates evil as it hates a bad smell.” (Wang, 1985, p. 202)

Likewise Butler avers that a person may be so morally deformed as to confuse good and evil.

“And as ‘the integrity of the upright guides him,’ guides even a man’s judgment; so wickedness may distort it to such a degree, as that he may ‘call evil good, and good evil; put darkness for light, and light for darkness.’” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 234)

These quotes show Butler’s and Wang’s wariness over how people’s basic moral perception can suffer disastrous distortion. However, two features of their more detailed diagnosis of human frailty warrant a closer look.

The first pertains to the moral fault-line; more specifically, is conscience subject to breakdown? Can a person’s conscience become dysfunctional? The case is clear for Butler, i.e., conscience is not immune from malfunction. In the following commentary, he is explicit in warning that a person’s conscience may fall into a slumber.

“Therefore if there be any such thing in mankind as putting half-deceits upon themselves; which there plainly is, either by avoiding reflection, or (if they do reflect) by religious equivocation, subterfuges, and palliating matters to themselves; by these means *conscience may be laid asleep*, and they may go on in a course of wickedness with less disturbance.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 98)

In Butler’s conception, conscience is vulnerable to impairment; it can be weakened and even become misguided. The case is less certain with Wang. In various texts, *liang-chih* is depicted as infallible, and when moral fallibility is acknowledged *hsin* is the locus of failure.

“Even when erroneous thoughts arise, *liang-chih* is present. Only because man does not know how to preserve it is the *hsin* sometimes lost. Even when the *hsin* is most darkened and obstructed, *liang-chih* is clear. Only because man does not know how to examine it is the *hsin* sometimes obscured.” (Wang, 1985, p. 135)

Here we see Wang sparing *liang-chih* and describing *hsin* as the subject of distortion. Admittedly, his treatment of *liang-chih* and *hsin* is not always defined clearly and the terms are used interchangeably. The potential for confusion notwithstanding, Wang, like Butler, admits that human basic moral perception can become misguided.

Another difference in Butler’s and Wang’s diagnoses is how they describe the stages of moral decline. There is a discernable “intermediate” phase that is described by Butler but not noted in Wang. Butler gives specific attention to the “weakened” state, where a person suffers an extended inner struggle, aware of but seemingly incapable of overcoming his or her errors.

“Yet, notwithstanding this, there *frequently appears* a suspicion, that all is not right, or as it should be: and perhaps there *is always* at bottom somewhat of this sort.” (Butler, 1900, V1, p. 132)

Put another way, Butler recognizes how a person can first become mired in a feeble state without losing the basic perception of right or wrong. It is only when this is left unchecked that one deteriorates to a “misguided” condition, at which time one’s moral compass becomes disoriented, i.e., confusing evil for good. This intermediate stage is less discernable in Wang. His diagnoses are framed mostly in terms of a straightforward two-phase downturn, i.e., the “big person” moral stature diminishes to that of the “small person.” Here is one version of this general depiction.

“Those who practiced the teaching naturally and easily were called sages, and those who practiced it with effort and difficulty were called worthies, but those who violated it were considered degenerate even though they were as intelligent as Tan-chu.” (Wang, 1985, p. 119)

Overall, Wang offers fewer specifics on the internal anguish that comes from knowing what is right yet being incapable of doing it, something that so occupied Butler's thought. Though not evident in his work, it is conceivable that Wang admitted to this transitional struggle. In sum, I submit, Butler provides a more nuanced analysis of the stages in a person's moral decline.

B3.2) External and Internal Wrongs

In Butler's and Wang's framework, moral wrongs may be divided into two types: external and internal. In the former, people simply neglect to perform the appropriate outer deeds. In the latter, people err due to their failure to act with the proper inner motivation. As discussed earlier, Butler is most concerned with unbridled egoistic acts while Wang's preoccupation is with the problem of sincerity. Of course, they are not indifferent to other vices; Butler is mindful of the hypocrisy quandary and Wang is concerned with the malice of selfishness. While they have common concerns, their specific diagnoses of the problems, i.e., egoism and insincerity, contain some intriguing nuances.

Butler's decisive refutation of egoistic theory in the Sermons preached at the Rolls Chapter is well known. In Wang's case, egoism was not his most pressing concern yet we see an astute examination of selfishness in his writings. As a matter of fact, he presents a certain uniquely delicate analysis not seen in Butler. In the following exegesis, Wang expresses a highly sensitive concern with "attachment."

"Not a single idea should be allowed to attach to the original substance of the mind, just as not the least dirt should be allowed to stick to the eye. It does not take much dirt for the whole eye to see nothing but complete darkness. ... This idea need not be a selfish idea. Even if it is good, it should not be attached to the

mind. If you put some gold or jade dust in the eye, just the same it cannot open.”
(Wang, 1985, p. 257)

Wang’s scrutiny of what constitutes selfishness is indeed refined. Butler, I submit, would not dispute Wang’s equating of “attachment” with a phenomenon of unhealthy self-interest, even though we see no mention of this term in his Sermons.

The fixation over attachment reflects Wang’s general wariness with the inner and subtler form of moral ills. As mentioned above, he is particularly concerned with the sincerity (*cheng*) issue. Here we see another rendition of his ridiculing of disingenuous acts:

“If the highest good means no more than having the details correct, then dressing like an actor and acting out these details correctly on the state would be called the highest good.” (Wang, 1985, p. 9)

Butler also expresses concerns about proper inner motivation, first and foremost in his criticism of hypocrisy.

“For hypocrisy, in the moral and religious consideration of things, is of much larger extent than every one may image. In common language, which is formed upon the common intercourses amongst men, hypocrisy signifies little more than their pretending what they really do not mean, in order to delude one another.” (Butler, 1900, VI, p. 230)

To act without genuine intention constitutes for Butler the evil of pretense. This may be taken as one variation of the insincerity quandary. Thus, we see a shared concern in Butler and Wang to ensure that actions are performed in the proper spirit.

Butler’s examination of inner intentions also exposes a moral vice not extensively analyzed by Wang, i.e., self-deceit. In a sermon entitled “Upon Self-Deceit,” Butler recounted David’s adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of her husband as epitomizing the vilest form of self-deception. A person, Butler warned,

may become so depraved as to fool even him or herself into believing that evil is good.

Wang's work does include allusions to deceit, as in the following:

“In human affairs tricks and deceits manifest themselves in a hundred ways. If one handles them without suspicion, one often gets cheated, but if one knows [the intentions behind them] one puts himself in the position of anticipating deceit and predicting being distrusted.” (Wang, 1985, p. 155)

However, the deceit Wang mentions here is not self-deception but rather deception by someone else. In his work, we see no explicit diagnosis of self-deceit as in Butler's case, yet it is reasonable to assume that he would not reject the possibility of such a moral failure.

B3.3) Fall and Recovery

People are liable to commit an assortment of wrongs, e.g., egoistic acts, hypocrisies, etc., and suffer a range of consequences, e.g., being mired in a weakened or even misguided state. Set in the big picture, how detrimental are these failings? Is there any possibility for rejuvenation? Can a person's innate capability be completely lost? Butler and Wang depicted the predicament in various degrees of gravity and envisioned moral recovery as being beset with different difficulties.

In their framework, moral failure may be defined first and foremost as falling short of an ordained standard, i.e., the divine order. Beyond this broad description, their characterizations of humankind's waywardness contain stark contrasts. The doctrine of sin is central in Butler's narrative. It speaks to humanity's rebellion against God, resulting in an unbridgeable chasm between humans and their Creator. In this alienated condition, people languish in a destitute state. Wang also equated wrongs with transgressions against *Tien's* will. By offending the Heavens, humans likewise suffered

the consequences of divine wrath and became subjected to feelings of guilt, shame, and humiliation. However, Wang's tone is decidedly less grave than Butler's. While a certain estrangement is experienced, there is nothing equivalent to the deep agonizing anguish of total depravity that accompanies the Christian sense of banishment from the divine communion.

While Butler and Wang put forward different theological explanations and descriptions of human transgression, their basic concerns remained the same, that is, that people are susceptible to degeneracy. Notwithstanding these depravities, Butler and Wang retained confidence in their belief that a person's innate moral compass can never become completely defunct. They maintained hope that the depraved still possessed the capability for recovery (see Chapter 2 section F3 and Chapter 3). How Butler and Wang perceived this restoration process is yet another story.

In Butler's salvation narrative, the doctrine of grace features prominently. At its core is the recognition that the deliverance of humankind is wholly contingent on divine prerogative. Unless God chooses to intervene, the fallen human race is helpless and condemned to a state of degradation. Moral redemption requires a deep sense of contrition and an acknowledgment of one's utter dependency on divine mercies.⁶¹ In like manner, Wang believed that *Tien's* empowerment was essential to overcoming human

⁶¹ The Christian tradition's interpretation of sin and grace has important internal variations. While there is a basic understanding of humankind as being separated from God, different Christian traditions depict this divide in different degrees of severity. The Calvinists present humankind as in an utterly helpless sinful condition redeemable only through divine grace. Butler's Anglican view advances a less severe picture, with a more sanguine account of the human role in the plan of salvation. For more on the contrast between the Calvinist and Butler's Anglican views of sin, grace, and salvation, see Paul Avis' *Anglicanism and the Christian Church: Theological Resources in Historical Perspective* (2002).

frailty. And he also depicted the recovery experience as being accompanied by excruciating personal spiritual agony. Yet his description of the Confucian struggle never matched the Christian experience of sheer powerlessness where one is absolutely dependent on divine intervention. Compared to the Christian version, the Confucian redemption story accords humans a more affirmative and proactive role.⁶²

C) Framework of Knowledge

Endowed with innate capability, humans can take on the task of acquiring the knowledge needed to realize the telos and *Tao*. Chapters 2 and 3 showed that Butler and Wang employed specific terms to categorize knowledge, e.g., general-particular and innate-extended. They also recognized different types of moral discernments, i.e., those pertaining to the more and less determinate challenges and those pertaining to the exceptional cases. While general semblances are evident, I will show that there are nuances in how Butler and Wang framed these moral decisions.

C1) General-Particular, Innate-Extended

At first sight, Butler's and Wang's basic terminologies are dissimilar. The former distinguished knowledge into general and particular forms, while the latter divided them into the innate and extended types. Their terms do convey distinct explanations of moral knowledge, yet they are not unfamiliar or inconsistent within their respective frameworks.

Butler begins by clarifying that in decision-making one is first guided by general principles. These serve as the basic references upon which more specific conclusions are

⁶² See Julia Ching's *Confucianism and Christianity: a Comparative Study* (1977) for further

made. To be sure, such a formulation is not explicitly stated in Wang's works yet they are implicit in his framework. His recognition of exceptional cases vis-à-vis the general norms is one such example. For instance, regarding conventions governing filial piety, he acknowledges that there are general principles serving as basic guidelines. And in most situations the appropriate decision is reached in conformity with these standard rules. Then, Wang reminds us, there are the extraordinary exigencies where the particular responses may warrant the suspension of those general principles (see Chapter 3 section E3.2).

In Wang's model, knowledge is divided into innate and extended types. He explains that all people are born with innate knowledge, but beyond this natural endowment people need to increase their understanding by extending their natural capability. These terms are not explicit in Butler's work, but the concepts are not inconsistent with his view of human nature. In his sermons expounding on this subject, Butler made clear that people are born with innate capability, and these need to be cultivated, or "extended" to use Wang's terms (see Chapter 2 sections C and G). Butler's use of the terms general-particular and Wang's use of innate-extended are thus not concepts at odds with each other in their respective frameworks.

C2) More and Less Determinate

A prominent feature in Butler's and Wang's framework is the admission that there are some challenges that can be resolved more determinately than others. Chapters 2 and 3 showed that they reckoned that some issues can be discerned with certainty,

where people are assumed to possess clear understanding. They also conceded that most deliberations are tinged with ambiguity and people are inevitably ambivalent on these subjects. While they share this common framework, the explications and assumptions they introduced to support it reveal differences. Two subjects will be examined here, namely, their accounts of limited human knowledge and the contents of the more and less determinate norms.

While they upheld a sanguine view of human nature, Butler and Wang also recognized human constraints, as attested by their concession to the less determinate cases. There are, however, noticeable differences in the ways they explained this reality. In Butler's work, one sees a more extended examination. In his sermon "Upon Human Ignorance," he enunciated specifically the limits of human knowledge, and in the *Analogy*, he made his famous appeal to probability as a response to human finitude. By contrast, there is no equivalent exposition on human ignorance in Wang's material. To be sure, Wang does not assume human knowledge to be infallible but his explication on the subject is scarce and cursory. This disparity raises two interesting corollary observations.

The first relates to the broader comparative assessment of Confucianism and Christianity. It is the generally accepted thesis that the former tends to adopt a more restrained or skeptical posture with regard to discerning the divine order. Conversely, the latter exudes more confidence and boldness in claiming a comprehension of the transcendent. Butler's and Wang's approaches seem to turn on this broad assumption. But contrary to what we might expect, on this particular subject, we find Butler displaying a more cautious and tentative attitude compared to Wang, who seems more self-assured.

This leads to the next point of interest: the factors that lead to Butler's surprising reticence and Wang's incongruous self-confidence. The tentativeness in Butler can be explained in large part by the historical phenomenon known as the Age of Reason. His caution is a reaction to what he saw as his generation's misguided adulation of the power of rationality. Therefore, the generally more subdued and severe tone of his sermons and writings was directed at dampening this misplaced confidence. In Wang's case, the converse is true. The Ming Dynasty was in a gradual decline. The general temperament was glum, the establishment was losing the faith of the masses, and the people in turn were doubting their moral capability. Wang therefore saw the need to restore confidence, to remind people of their innate ability to discern right from wrong.

Butler's and Wang's framework of more and less determinate norms presents another important comparative point, i.e., the specific content of the framework. How to ascertain what is more or less determinate is without question a controversial exercise. In their respective contexts, Butler and Wang debated with their counterparts over what constituted these two norms. Similarities and differences can be noted in their arguments. For example, they seem to agree that affirming the transcendent's existence belongs to the more determinate genre. However, there appears to be less common ground on the question of whether the afterlife can be ascertained with more or less determinacy. The content of Butler's and Wang's norms will be compared in more detail in Chapter 5.

C3) Exceptional Cases

The next key element in Butler's and Wang's framework is the principle of the exception to the rule. In the main, people are guided by general norms, yet there are extraordinary situations that warrant suspension of the normal rules. Here we see Butler explaining the case:

“Upon the whole then, we see wise reasons, why the course of the world should be carried on by general law, and good ends accomplished by this means: and, for ought we know, there may be the wisest reasons for it, and the best ends accomplished by it.” (Butler, 1990, V2, p. 126)

Butler then qualifies the statement by acknowledging that not all problems can be solved by general rules.

“We have no ground to believe, all irregularities could be remedied as they arise, or could have been precluded, by general law. We find that interpositions would produce evil, and prevent good: and, for ought we now, they would produce greater evil than they would prevent; and prevent greater good than they would produce.” (Butler, 1990, V2, p. 126)

He then concludes that if this is the situation, then there is justification to act outside of the standard norms.

“And if this be the case, then the not interposing is so far from being a ground of complaint, that it is an instance of goodness. This is intelligible and sufficient: and going further, seems beyond the utmost reach of our faculties.” (Butler, 1990, V2, p. 126)

The above shows that Butler maintained the case for exceptional responses. As discussed earlier, Wang also affirmed and defended people's need at times to act outside of the status quo (see Chapter 3 section E3.2). It is clear that Butler and Wang share a common recognition of exceptions. Nevertheless, there are slight nuances in the reasons behind their efforts to state the case and how they presented the arguments.

When elaborating on these exceptional cases, the force of Wang's argument is to remind people of the need at times to act out of the norm. In Butler, the focus is more specifically pointed at people's duties, i.e., in some exceptional situations one ought to

act on certain imperatives regardless of consequences. There are contextual explanations for these differences in emphasis. In Wang's case, a rules-based morality has become a bane. Public institutions were suffering from routinization and people's capability to think outside of rigid formality was stifled. It is in light of such dire conditions that he saw the necessity to challenge people to act out of the norm, warning them not to be bound by the status quo but to be prepared to act exceptionally when responding to exigencies. In Butler's context, the main predicament is framed somewhat differently. The issue is not people's inability to recognize exceptions but the lack of courage to respond to those exceptional duties which at times call for considerable self-sacrifice. Therefore, Butler's effort was directed at reassuring people that the duty duly performed under exceptional circumstances will be justly rewarded.

In summation, Butler and Wang recognize the need for exceptional responses. While the principle is affirmed they are driven by different reasons in reasserting the exception to the rule cases. Wang was concerned to remind people of the need for out of the norm deeds while Butler was eager to reassure people their exceptional duty will be duly rewarded.

D) Objectivity and Diversity

The history of human thought is characterized by the perennial anxiety to ensure that judgments are rendered justly without any perception of partiality. In their respective worldviews, Butler and Wang believed that God and *Tien* had installed a set of natural laws from which human knowledge is derived and by which human conduct is evaluated.

The human task is to sharpen one's acumen so as to discern clearly these impartial standards.

D1) The Vision

Butler's and Wang's visions of an objective order are anchored on two key assumptions: the existence of a righteous deity and the doctrine of natural law.

Section A contrasted aspects of the Christian and Confucian versions of the transcendent. Another common trait in Butler's God and Wang's *Tien* is their role as a judicious governor who pronounces unbiased judgments. In the following excerpt from *Hsun Tzu*, *Tien* is depicted as one who rules with single-mindedness:

"*Tien's* ways are constant. It does not prevail because of a sage like Yao; it does not prevail because of a tyrant like Chieh. Respond to it with good government, and good fortune will result; respond to it with disorder, and misfortune will result. If you encourage agriculture and are frugal in expenditures, then heaven cannot make you poor . . . if you practice the Way and are not of two minds, then Heaven cannot bring you misfortune." (*Hsun Tzu*, in Chan, 1963, p. 124)

In like manner, Butler's God is perceived as a moral sovereign who exacts judgment equitably on all people.

"Upon the whole: there is a kind of moral government implied in God's natural government; virtue and vice are naturally rewarded and punished as beneficial and mischievous to society; and rewarded and punished directly as virtue and vice." (Butler, 1990, V2, p. 66)

God or *Tien*, Butler and Wang professed, is an upright governor who rules with nobility, rewarding and punishing according to a constant standard.

To maintain order, the divine sovereign has put in place laws to regulate the natural and human domains. Chapter 3 section E1 showed that in Wang's account these laws are natural principles regarded as timeless and contextless moral imperatives,

operative at all times and in all places. In the following exegesis on virtue, Butler also suggested similar characteristics in the standards guiding human behavior:

“For, as much as it has been disputed wherein virtue consists, or whatever ground for doubt there may be about particulars; yet, in general, there is in reality an universally acknowledged standard of it.”

Virtue, according to Butler, contains criteria that are universal:

“It is that, which all ages and all countries have made profession of in public: it is that which every man you meet puts on the show of: it is that, which the primary and fundamental laws of all civil constitutions over the face of the earth make it their business and endeavor to enforce the practice of upon mankind: namely, justice, veracity, and regard to common good.” (Butler, VI, p. 287)

These virtuous norms, Butler says, are for all ages, i.e., timeless, and for all places, i.e., contextless. Thus, like Wang, Butler assumed that there are universal standards effective at all times and in all places. In summation, the two thinkers see in God and *Tien*, respectively, an impartial ruler who has put in place a set of universal laws to govern the natural order and the human domain.

D2) The Reality

While envisioning an objective order, Butler and Wang are mindful that what forms a just decision is often not discerned clearly nor resolved without controversy. They are thus confronted with a reality of pluralistic and often competing moral viewpoints.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I showed that Butler and Wang approached the dilemma by dividing reality into primary and secondary orders. Broadly, the former represents challenges of the more determinate genre while the latter involves challenges of the less determinate genre. This two-tiered framework allows them to accommodate diverse

points of view on secondary norms while enforcing strict conformity on the primary order. The acceptance of diverse opinions on those secondary norms is a concession to some subjectivity, yet I argue that this is not extreme relativism. Butler's and Wang's firm enforcement of the primary norms sets the check on permissible subjectivism, thus ensuring that certain objective boundaries are maintained. This twofold response, I submit, enabled Butler and Wang to practice toleration without compromising order. I also presented a historical appraisal of Butler's and Wang's reactions to the religious pluralism of 18th century England and 16th century Ming China. Their views on world religions, I surmise, may be regarded as both inclusive and exclusive. They included some traditions as moral counterparts and excluded others for failure to comply with certain primary fundamentals (see Chapter 2 section E and Chapter 3).

While Butler's and Wang's responses to moral pluralism revealed a common basic framework, there are also differences. The most obvious divergences pertain to the contents of the primary and secondary norms. The two thinkers debated with their counterparts over these contents. A brief survey suggests certain similarities and differences in their classifications. For example, both affirmed that belief in the transcendent belongs to the primary order. But there are also apparent dissimilarities, for instance, the criteria for distinguishing natural and revealed religions that was used by Butler was foreign to Wang. Chapter 5 will explore further the semblances and nuances in Butler's and Wang's descriptions of the contents of the primary and secondary orders.

E) Moral Cultivation

The human person is designed to be morally sufficient yet remains fallible. For this reason, the need for diligent nurturing of moral capability is not lost on Butler and Wang. Their moral cultivation programs will be compared under three main headings: Study and Spiritual Programs, Institutional Cultivation, and Strategy and Priority.

E1) Study and Spiritual Programs

A common refrain in Butler's and Wang's work is their plea for moderation, specifically a call for a delicate balancing of reason and sense, devoting equal efforts to developing the mind and also the heart. In Butler's phraseology, the task is to equip oneself with sound reflection and astute sentiment. Wang's quest is framed mainly in terms of *li* and *jen*, acquiring the ability to discern the correct acts and also the proper spirit for actions. Based on these emphases, their cultivation projects, I submit, may be divided into two parts: the study and spiritual programs to cultivate reason and sense, respectively.

E1.1) Study Program

One of Butler's and Wang's chief goals is to cultivate the intellect and nurture critical thinking in a person. To that end, the discipline of study is a central part of their moral project. Here is one of Wang's exhortations to study:

“To study extensively, to inquire accurately, to think carefully, to sift clearly, and to practice earnestly are all efforts of refinement for the sake of singleness of mind. As to the rest, to study literature extensively is the effort to be restrained by the rules of propriety, to investigate things and to extend knowledge are efforts to make the will sincere, to pursue study and inquiry is the effort to honor one's moral nature, and to manifest goodness is the effort to make the personal life sincere.” (Wang, 1985, p. 29)

In their effort to promote study and the development of sound reasoning, Butler and Wang rely on two primary modes of instruction, i.e., textual and verbal. The former involves reading and reflecting on the written texts, including ancient chronicles, history, literature, and commentaries. For Butler, the Holy Scripture is the centerpiece and is supported by ancillary scholarly treatises. In Wang's case, it is the five ancient classics and later the Four Books that form the Confucian canon. The two traditions' collections have many differences. One in particular stands out: the sacred status accorded to the Christian scripture as the direct word of God. Wang's Confucian classical compilation, while revered, was never ascribed such a divine stature. Beyond the textual mode, cultivation of the mind also relies on the verbal medium. The Christian and Confucian traditions engage the intellect through the spoken word in teaching, preaching, discussion, dialogue, and debate. For Wang, the oral tradition was formed primarily around the lectern in master-student teaching sessions. For Butler, the inspiring interaction between the preacher and the pew via the pulpit is the staple and hallmark of the ministry of the word.

E1.2) Spiritual Program

Beyond the rational, Butler's and Wang's concern also extended to nurturing moral sensibility. In this effort to cultivate the spiritual dimension of the self, rituals, which may be broadly categorized into religious and civil types, take a leading role.

The purpose of religious rites is to instill reverence for the sacred and the transcendent. Butler's religious rituals are centered in the church, ranging from the simple acts of prayer and penitence to the elaborate and esoteric ceremonies of baptism and the

holy sacraments. Wang's religious practices were set within the Confucian halls or temples and ranged from the mundane rites of private meditations to the elaborate ceremonies for paying homage to the spirits of the transcendent and Heaven.

Civil rituals are designed to nurture moral sensibility at the communal level, i.e., to strengthen a person's sense of compassion, affection, and respect for her fellows. For Butler, the church and the family provide the loci for believers to cultivate their interpersonal sensibilities through fellowship and intimate family ties. Wang had a doctrine of the five basic relationships (father-son, elder-younger brother, husband-wife, friend-friend, and ruler-subject) that exhorted people to nurture appropriate interaction as defined by sets of social decorum, e.g., the filial piety that defines the father-son relationship. Here is one of Wang's reminders of the ancient Confucian precepts:

“Between father and son there should be affection, between ruler and minister there should be righteousness, between man and wife there should be attention to their separate functions, between old and young there should be a proper order, and between friends there should be faithfulness, that is all.” (Wang, 1985, p. 119)

One difference between Butler's and Wang's civil rituals is the scope of their practices. Wang's emphasis on proper social etiquette, e.g., through filial piety, ancestral worship, etc., served to cultivate the proper form so as to ensure that a person performs *li* with appropriate *jen*. Butler, while aware of the need to cultivate proper social conduct, has no equivalent emphasis on civil rituals.⁶³

E2) Institutional

⁶³ Julia Ching presented a similar analysis and conclusion on the different Christian and Confucian modes and media of self-cultivation. See her *Confucianism and Christianity: a Comparative Study* (1977).

While all people are assumed to bear responsibility for self-cultivation, Butler and Wang realized that the development of the individual is not independent of external oversight. Human frailty calls for exterior supervision to direct a person toward moral growth and to guard the individual from errors. To carry out this moral oversight, Butler and Wang relied on a variety of institutions. Three in particular play key roles: the Christian church/Confucian academy, the family, and the state. The two traditions allowed these bodies varying degrees of scope and accorded them different levels of importance.

E2.1) Church and Academy

The church and the academy were at the heart of Butler's Christian and Wang's Confucian institutional identities, respectively, yet their roles differed within the two traditions. The church assumed the central place in Butler's order. It exercised complete authority and took a hands-on approach to governing communal life. Butler's church oversaw a comprehensive range of activities, from infant baptism to funeral rites. And it had a standing class of clergy to implement a broad-spectrum program ranging from personal spirituality to collective education. By contrast, Wang's academy held an important but less extensive role. While concerned with the community's well-being, Wang's academy did not operate in the pastoral role that Butler's church assumed. Its functions were more akin to those of contemporary think tanks, dispensing moral philosophical insights rather than providing practical pastoral services. It did not have the equivalent of Butler's priesthood; instead, the academy trained scholars who were intended to serve the state as bureaucrats rather than grassroots pastors. Wang's academy

saw itself as one member in an extensive network of institutions, including the family, public schools, and the state, that served the welfare of the community.

Many reasons led to the different roles of Butler's church and Wang's academy, but one key factor was how they perceived themselves as God and *Tien*'s messenger. For Butler, the church served as the bearer and custodian of an exclusive Gospel, one that was revealed specifically to the Christian community; therefore, there is an acute sense of special responsibility to ensure that the Good News is properly transmitted within its tightly controlled network of churches. Here we see one of Butler's eloquent expressions of the church's role:

“Any particular church, in whatever place established, is like ‘a city that is set on a hill, which cannot be hid,’ inviting all who pass by, to enter into it.” (Butler, 1990, V1, p. 205)

Wang also saw himself as a transmitter of *Tien*'s message, which, while sacred, was not esoteric or exclusive. He therefore treated his teachings more as a “public morality” that was conveyable through a broader range of human institutions and was therefore willing to delegate and share moral oversight extensively with other institutions.

Both traditions also employed examinations as a form of cultivation, specifically as a means to measure potential leadership. Butler's clerical order subjected its candidates to rigorous theological training. He himself was schooled at Oxford before qualifying for the Anglican order. Wang's academy also screened aspiring scholars through exams, and Wang himself attempted the civil examination three times before qualifying as a Confucian scholar-bureaucrat. Indeed, the Confucians made much more extensive use of the examination system than the Christians did. It was relied upon to staff not only the academy but also the imperial bureaucracy. To be sure, England

depended on Oxford and Cambridge graduates to run its civil services but this was not as extensive a network as the Confucian civil examination system.

E2.2) The Family

Butler and Wang regarded the family as the prime locus of cultivation. Both saw the family as the basic building block leading to a larger vision of a harmonious humanity, with the fundamentals of healthy human relationships beginning in the intimacy of immediate family ties. Nevertheless, there were differences in their approaches to utilizing the family.

In Butler, the definition of the term “family” was expanded to include those sharing a common faith, i.e., the Christian family. Thus, within Butler’s order, the traditional family is supported by the new extended family, i.e., the church. Christian fellowship provides a crucial substitute context for personal cultivation. While Butler’s church worked to supplement the immediate family, it was also responsible for the unintended consequence of diminishing the traditional family’s significance. The focus of Butler’s cultivation shifted somewhat to the new family of fellow Christians.

In Wang’s tradition, there is nothing equivalent to the establishment of the Christian church family. Wang’s academy with its think tank role was not meant to be a substitute Confucian fellowship to supplement or supplant the family. To be sure, Wang had a vision of the extended family, i.e., the human family, but it was a vision to be pursued in the long term. To realize this vision of the one human family, Wang applied a

model of concentric circles, beginning with the cultivation of the self within the immediate family and extending outwards to the universal family.

“There is no one who cannot teach his own family and yet can teach others. Therefore the superior man (ruler) without going beyond his family can bring education into completion in the whole state. Filial piety is that with which one serves his ruler. Brother respect is that with which one serves his elders, and deep is that with which one treats the multitude . . . When the individual families have become humane, then the whole country will be aroused towards humanity. When the individual families have become compliant, then the whole country will be aroused towards compliance . . . Therefore the order of the state depends on the regulation of the family.” (*Ta Hsueh*, Chan, p. 91)

Wang believed that achieving this vision required deliberate, small steps. Hence, the immediate family remained central to Wang’s moral cultivation program.⁶⁴

E2.3) The State

Butler and Wang both recognized the role of the state in moral leadership. Throughout history, Butler’s church and Wang’s academy maintained, in varying degrees, cooperation with their political counterparts, the monarchy and the imperial Court, to shape the moral direction of the country and dynasty. In Butler’s England, the relationship between church and state underwent dramatic changes. The palace and the cathedral had traditionally maintained a close relationship of patronage. The English monarch reigned under the doctrine of the divine right to rule and was thus eager to secure moral legitimacy via the church’s anointing. The Church of England in turn counted on the English monarch to provide political and military protection from threats, which at that time included the Roman church. The upheavals of the 17th century, however, led to a reconfiguration of this relationship into a more guarded stance. The principles of separation and institutional checks and balances were put in place to protect

both the church and the state from unwanted mutual interference. Parliament enacted legislation to curtail the monarchy's (and Parliament's own) incursion into ecclesiastical matters and, vice versa, to restrict the church's participation in the affairs of the state. To the sure, the wall that separated church from state was not entirely impervious. The English continued to expect their leadership to have moral character, though in a nonsectarian form. Parliament governed with the consultation of the divines, though the church's opinions were no longer edicts. Likewise, the church was protected from Parliament's interference by law.⁶⁵

In China, the imperial palace traditionally courted the patronage of the Confucian academy and vice versa. Ruling under the doctrine of Heaven's mandate, the dynastic families were eager to procure the endorsement of the moral elite, i.e., the Confucian academy. The academy in turn relied on the state to run the public schools and civil examinations as means for promoting moral cultivation. While this cooperation worked amicably for the most part, sometimes the interaction between the imperial court and the academy produced serious conflicts. Hence there was a concern to protect both the monarchy and the scholars from each other's undue influence. However, in contrast to what happened in Butler's England, the Chinese did not set up legal mechanisms and safeguards to enforce a dichotomy. As a result, the relationship between palace and

⁶⁴ See Julia Ching's *Confucianism and Christianity: a Comparative Study* (1977) exposition of the family and community in moral cultivation.

⁶⁵ For a fuller account of the evolution of English institutions, see Gilley and Sheils, ed., *A History of Religion in Britain* (1994, part II, p. 127-252), Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England* (1986), and S. C. Carpenter, *Eighteenth Century Church* (1959).

academy was not guided by set rules and this lack of protection was felt most acutely when the Emperor pressed his influence on the scholars.⁶⁶

E3) Strategies in Cultivation

Butler's and Wang's projects utilize various media, e.g., study, rituals, etc., and call upon diverse institutions, e.g., school, family, state, etc., to assist in developing the moral self. Underlying these extensive frameworks are two discernable strategies: differentiation of norms and prioritization of efforts.

E3.1) Differentiated Norms

As discussed earlier, Butler and Wang affirmed human potential yet admitted that people possessed varied capacities. This fact is reflected in their moral projects when they acknowledge that people may have to put in different moral efforts relative to their specific locations. Here is Wang's view on this as presented earlier:

“Those below the average must make one hundred efforts where others make one, and one thousand efforts where others make ten.” (Wang, 1985, p. 61)

The reality that people are to tailor their cultivation programs to their respective needs is not lost on Butler. In the following passage, we see his description of how practices are to be suited to people in varying moral conditions.

“Upright creatures may want to be improved: depraved creatures want to be renewed. Education and discipline, which may be in all degrees and sorts of gentleness and of severity, is expedient for those: but must be absolutely necessary for these. For these, discipline of the severer sort too, and in the higher degree of it, must be necessary, in order to wear out vicious habits, to recover their primitive strength of self government, which indulgence must have

⁶⁶ William Theodore de Bary's *The Trouble with Confucianism* (1992) provides an in depth analysis of the Confucian/Chinese political order, contrasting its relatively weaker institutional checks and balances with those present in the Western/English framework.

weakened; to repair, as well as raise into a habit, the moral principle, in order to their arriving at a secure state of virtuous happiness.” (Butler, 1990, V2, p. 90)

It is apparent that for Butler and Wang the moral discipline imposed on people must take into account their diverse moral locations.

E3.2) Prioritized Effort

While recognizing the need to correlate expectations to people’s particular standings, Butler and Wang, I argue, also submitted their moral projects to a higher principle, i.e., prioritization of effort based on the primary and secondary orders. As explained earlier, the primary order represents values of the more determinate form, which Butler and Wang assumed all people already know and are expected to know, for example, upholding belief in the transcendent. The secondary order involves challenges of the less determinate type, where people have no clear or conclusive understanding, for instance, with regard to the transcendent’s specific characteristics. In pursuing the ideal self, Butler and Wang, took a two-pronged approach based on these orders. The priority was to work on what may be called simply the “primary self.” At this level Butler and Wang sought to ensure that people cultivated “basic” moral expertise. Attention is then shifted to what may be referred to as the “secondary self.” Here the two thinkers worked to equip people with the abilities needed to resolve challenges of the secondary order. Butler’s and Wang’s strategy, I submit, was to first establish the primary and then proceed to the secondary. In other words, they demanded that people be at least competent in what they ought to know (the primary norms) before attempting the secondary-order challenges. This prioritization of effort leads to two further important observations.

First, it allows Butler and Wang to enforce certain minimal standards. Section E3.1 discussed how people's different capabilities give rise to the need for variegated expectations. Notwithstanding this general recognition, Butler and Wang also obliged all to conform to specific fundamental standards, i.e., the primary order. It is unreasonable, they conceded, to assume that every person possesses full moral capabilities. Nevertheless, they accepted no excuse from people for failing to exhibit at least a certain basic moral aptitude. Therefore, Butler and Wang may tolerate diversity in people's moral capability but they expected all to have a set of fundamental primary skills.

The second observation pertains to cultivation strategy, i.e., the laying out of a proper sequence in moral practices. This is discussed more explicitly in the Confucian material where concentric circles are commonly used to emphasize the need to first master the core principles before proceeding outwards towards the universal. Here we see Wang using an agricultural metaphor to state a similar argument.

“To make up one's mind and to exert efforts are like planting a tree. At first there are only roots and sprouts but not yet the trunk. When there is a trunk there is not yet branches. When there are branches then come the leaves and when there are leaves then come the flowers and fruits. When the root is first planted, one should only care for it and water it and should not think of branches, leaves, flowers, or fruits. What good is it to engage in fantasy? So long as one does not neglect the care of the plant, there is no fear that there will be no branches, leaves, flowers, or fruits.” (Wang, 1985, p. 32)

For Wang there are roots and branches in moral development. Unless the foundation is laid securely, attempts to rise above ground would be premature and dangerous. In the following passage, Wang uses the five basic relationships to assert the same point.

“The love between father and son and between elder and younger brothers is the starting point of the human mind's spirit of life, just like the sprout of the tree. From here it is extended to humaneness to all people and love to all things. It is just like the growth of the trunk, branches, and leaves.” (Wang, 1985, p. 57)

Admittedly, Butler does not speak explicitly about such a sequence, yet I argue that this notion is not incongruent with his overall plan. In summary, I submit that Butler's and Wang's cultivation strategy is to give priority to the primary over the secondary and to ensure that people at the minimum attain a certain basic moral aptitude.

F) Butler's and Wang's Specific Concerns

Butler and Wang looked to institutions, i.e., churches, academies, the family, and the state, for leadership. Alas, as human entities these institutions are not immune from errors. In their respective historical contexts, Butler and Wang confronted schools of thought they considered to be in error. Here we see one of Wang's laments over some of his eminent counterparts' obtuse teachings.

“I have just discussed learning with these elders. Like trying to put a square into a circle, I got nowhere with them. This *Tao* of ours is like a level road. Unfortunately, famous but mediocre scholars often block their own way and consequently fall into a field of obstacles for their whole lives without repentance. I don't know what they are talking about.” (Wang, 1985, p. 259)

As discussed earlier, Wang's more specific criticism is directed at the Mohist representation of nature and with Chu Hsi and Buddhism's unbalanced cultivation of the mind and the heart. In Butler's case, the challenges were leveled at Hobbes's misinterpretation of human nature and the Deists' and Wesley's failure to maintain balance in nurturing reason and sense. Section B2.1.3 pointed out the correspondence in Butler's and Wang's concerns with regard to the Deist-Wesley and Chu Hsi-Buddhist dialectics. In the following section, these historical opponents of Butler and Wang will be juxtaposed to show how their perceived misguided leadership contains some interesting parallels and nuances.

F1) Hobbes and Mo Tzu

For Butler and Wang, the first priority is to ensure that primary doctrines and rituals are maintained and then to support the development of secondary beliefs and rites in the most reasonable and sensible manner. In their view, Hobbes and Mo Tzu presented a misinterpretation of nature and human nature that violated the core tenets of their moral assumptions.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679 CE) and Mo Tzu (470–390 BCE) were political philosophers reacting to their respective historical exigencies, a 17th century England ravaged by religious war and a China torn asunder by the crisis of the Warring States (500–220 BCE). In the face of the inhumanity and atrocities that were their historical reality, both arrived at remarkably similar melancholy interpretations of nature and human nature.⁶⁷ In the Mohists, we find this dark depiction of the state of nature:

“In the beginning of human life, when there was yet no law and government, the custom was: ‘Every man according to his own idea’ . . . As a result, father and son, and elder and younger brothers became enemies and estranged from each other, and were unable to reach any agreement. The people of the world worked against each other with water, fire and poison. Surplus energy was not spent for mutual aid: surplus goods were allowed to rot without sharing; excellent teachings were kept secret and not taught to one another. The disorder in the [human] world was like that among birds and beasts. Yet it was evident that all this disorder was owing to the want of a ruler.” (*Mo Tzu* in Watson trans., 1967, p. 34)

Likewise in Hobbes’s view, the state of nature is one of enmity and mistrust.

“Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man.” (*Leviathan*, p.88)

For both Hobbes and Mo Tzu, the general gloomy state of nature is mirrored in the psychology of human nature. The individual does not possess a moral capacity for virtue,

i.e., an impartial benevolence that enables one to act selflessly. Contrary to their respective prevailing conventional assumptions, Hobbes and Mo Tzu held that human beings are wholly driven by self-interest and a desire for preservation of the self. For this reason, they argued, the ethos upon which human community ought to be founded is ethical egoism; therefore, they appealed to enlightened self-interest as the means to motivate people to act and as the cement to hold the collective body together in a cooperative act of mutual self-preservation.

The views of Hobbes and the Mohists contravened those of their respective moral establishments and hence were roundly criticized. Both of their lines of thought were dismissed as mischaracterizations of nature and human nature and violations of the fundamental beliefs of the moral order. In England, Butler rose to respond to the Hobbesian challenge with his Rolls Chapel Sermons. In China, classical Confucianism first refuted Mo Tzu and later, in the Ming era, Wang was compelled to launch a fresh rebuttal of Mohism's lingering menace.

While there are similarities in the Hobbes-versus-Christianity and Mohism-versus-Confucianism dialectic, there are also subtle differences. First, Hobbes faced the accusation of being an (implicit) atheist, a charge never made against Mo Tzu. To be sure, Hobbes did not explicitly deny the existence of God, yet his view of nature as intrinsically chaotic so contravened the Christian belief in a God who made order out of chaos that his view was understood to lead to the logical conclusion of the nonexistence of God. Hobbes was accordingly suspected of being a closet atheist, and in 17th century

⁶⁷ Benjamin Schwartz's *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (1985) presents a comparable analysis of the Mohists and Hobbes.

England, that was a sin which carried a heavy price. A second difference between Hobbes and the Mohists lies in their redefinition of the telos and *Tao*. It is clear that Hobbes rejected outright the prevailing telos of harmonious coexistence as unrealistic. The best that humans can and should aim for is a *modus vivendi*, with a collective body of enlightened, self-interested people working together to ensure mutual self-preservation or else facing the threat of mutual destruction. The Mohists' position on the *Tao* is less clear. What is certain is that the Mohists did advocate a realist appeal to enlightened self-interest. Nevertheless, they continued to affirm the *Tao* of harmonious coexistence, or at least did not explicitly dismiss that ideal. The Mohist strategy is best understood as an appeal to self-interest as a stopgap measure to stabilize what was then a crisis situation in China. The hope was that once the situation was stabilized by the anchor of enlightened self-interest, then under more stable and peaceful conditions the vision of truly harmonious coexistence on the basis of virtue may yet be revived. A final difference between Hobbes and the Mohists is their respective historical impacts. There is no dispute that Hobbes has become a dominant figure in the Western philosophical landscape, but it was the Mohists who appeared to have notched some real political and institutional accomplishments. The Mohists and their close compatriots the Legalists enjoyed the patronage of the Chinese state, with their views becoming the official ideology during the Chin dynasty (221–206 BCE). Hobbes's personal fate was less fortunate; he was under constant threat of being charged with heresy, which in 17th century England carried the penalty of death. He sought temporary refuge in Holland and later felt safe to return to England when the young king Charles II, Hobbes's former pupil, took a personal interest in ensuring Hobbes's welfare.

F2) The Deists and Wesley; Chu Hsi and Buddhism

Beyond their concern to maintain the primary norms, Butler and Wang sought to ensure that the secondary norms were developed in a reasonable and sensible manner. This calls for a balanced harnessing of the power of reason and the vigor of the senses. Failure could lead to excesses on either side. To err on the side of reason would result in conservatism and tyranny, and to err on the side of sense would lead to disorderliness and anarchy. Moral traditions through the ages have wrestled to find the appropriate equilibrium between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. In England, Butler's effort to hold together the dialectic of reason and faith was exercised between the opposing pulls of the Deists and Wesley.⁶⁸ And in the Ming era, Wang's attempts to balance convention and transformation were done between Chu's Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism.⁶⁹ In Butler's and Wang's respective struggles to maintain equipoise, there are some interesting similarities and also critical differences.

a) Butler and the Deists, Wang and Chu

The Deists and Chu Hsi (1130–1200 CE) in their respective 17th and 12th century contexts were responding to what they perceived to be a moral order suffering disarray due to a lack of reason-guided moral sensibility. For the Deists, the 17th century English religious wars were the epitome of all that can go wrong when religious zeal is

⁶⁸ Placing the Deists and Wesley within the broader conflict of reason and sense is a thesis commonly espoused in scholarship on 17th and 18th century English thought. See Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, vol I and II (1991).

⁶⁹ To frame Wang's concern with Chu Hsi and Buddhism in the reason-and-sense dialectic is not implausible. After all, Confucian scholarship designated Chu Hsi as part of the "Rational School" and Wang as part of the "School of Sense." While Chu and Wang were placed at opposite ends of this spectrum, I argue that the Buddhist position is further away from Chu, in terms of an emphasis on sense, than is Wang.

unchecked by reason. They responded by reinstating reason's authority with a new philosophical and religious worldview that stripped away what they perceived to be superstitions, which were mostly the claims of special revelation, including the divinity of Christ but also more general beliefs such as the notion of God as a moral governor. For Chu Hsi, the 12th century Sung order suffered from a dilapidated cultivation program, in large part as a result of Buddhism's undue influence. In response, he spearheaded an extensive reform to restore order to the education program, introducing a new curriculum consisting of the Four Books and reorganizing the Confucian examination system. Thus, both the Deists and Chu shared a concern for what they perceived to be sense-induced disorderliness and they sought to reinstate reason or rationality to check the confusion.

Their efforts to restore order, however, had their critics. The Deists had to contend with Butler among others. He concurred that unchecked religious zeal had resulted in inordinate passions, yet in his assessment the Deists had overreacted by dismissing key Christian tenets. The Deists, in Butler's account, failed to accord due deference to sense in general and to God in particular. In the history of Confucian educational reform, Chu Hsi's efforts are widely recognized as monumental and enduring. Nevertheless, this did not free him from criticism, and Wang was one of his harshest opponents. Chu, in Wang's view, erred by overemphasizing the rational to the neglect of the senses, and Chu's institutional reforms had, over time, suffered fossilization. This broad review shows how Butler and the Deists in England and Wang and Chu in China were concerned with maintaining the appropriate balance between reason and sense. While there are parallels between the two contexts, there are also some key differences. The English disputes were mostly carried out at the intellectual level. Butler's concerns with the

Deists' failure to exercise sensibility were mostly expressed at the conceptual level. By contrast, Wang and Chu's dispute was centered on institutional reform. To be sure, Wang did have a conceptual dispute with Chu but it grew well beyond the theoretical and local. Wang was critical of Chu's educational reforms, which he thought overly emphasized the study program, with no equal attention given to the spiritual program.

b) Butler and Wesley, Wang and the Buddhists

John Wesley (1703–1791 CE) and the Buddhists in their respective historical contexts were in general responding to what they perceived to be a prevailing moral order that suffered from a lack of spiritual vitality due to an under-cultivation of moral sensibility. While the Deists diagnosed the 17th century crisis as a neglect of reason, Wesley reached the opposite conclusion. In his view, the English moral malaise was the result of human irreverence of God, with the people showing contempt for the Christian creed and thus sowing the seeds of their own distress. Therefore, Wesley sought to reinvigorate the moral sense towards a deeper deference and piety for the sacred and he elevated the Holy Spirit as the primary means of moral discernment.

In China there was tacit acknowledgement that a moral order that was dominated by Confucian rationalism needed a sense-based tradition as a counterweight. To that end, Taoism, a home-grown tradition, and Buddhism, an adopted one, developed in the Chinese moral landscape to serve as such a counterbalance. Thus, the Buddhists set themselves up to check the excess rationality of the Confucians by emphasizing meditation and spirituality. Therefore, both Wesley and the Buddhists shared a concern

for what they perceived to be a lack of moral fervor due to a neglect of spirituality and sought to emphasize the nurturing of the senses.

Unsurprisingly, their efforts to infuse sensibility met with criticism. Wesley had Butler to contend with. The bishop shared Wesley's concern that an overconfidence in reason inhibited spiritual fervor, hence his critique of the Deists, but he believed that Wesley overreacted and committed the opposite error of not paying adequate attention to reason. In Butler's view, Wesley's excessive dependence on the Holy Spirit rendered Methodism vulnerable to exaggerated and unsubstantiated moral claims. Similarly, Buddhism faced criticism from the Confucian establishment for its perceived lack of rational restraint. During the Ming dynasty, the Buddhists had to contend with Wang's critique. In Wang's view, the Buddhists' excessive reliance on sense undermined their social responsibility, leading them to withdraw into a hermit-like existence. Thus, the disputes between Butler and Wesley in England and between Wang and the Buddhists in China were both centered on the need to maintain an appropriate balance between reason and sense.

But there are also some differences in these debates. In the Ming context, Wang articulated his critique against the Buddhists' inclination to pursue nirvana at the expense of social interaction. By contrast, in the English context, Wesley's excessive focus on the senses had the opposite effect. Butler was concerned that the Methodists were too enthusiastic in their moral and social activism. Wesley's fault was not disengagement from social concern; in fact, the Methodists became one of the most socially active movements, with missionary ventures to rural England and also to the colonies of the New World.

G) Butler and Wang: Historical Standing and Personal Experiences

Butler and Wang were thinkers who sought to promote proper moral cultivation. While this comparative survey has shown some of the similarities and differences in their conceptual and practical moral concerns, it should be noted that Butler and Wang were also operating from an ecclesiastical position and a political standing, respectively, which afforded them distinct perspectives and different degrees of authority. As a Bishop of the Church of England, Butler had a seat within the English order. His observations of the challenges facing England were from the establishment's perspective. Although England was comparatively tranquil after the upheavals of the 17th century, Butler began to notice a stirring at the water's edge. His critique of Wesley was a confrontation against a fringe nonconformist group that had strayed too far from the mainstream. The Deists in some ways also presented a fringe challenge, for they were considered anomalous by many. However, the English establishment was being driven by the same currents of the Age of Reason as the Deists were, so Butler's critique of them was in a way a self-criticism of the establishment also. Wang's illustrious public career as a Ming Court censor, magistrate, provincial governor, military General, and Confucian philosopher clearly placed him within the establishment. Yet he never quite fit into the mainstream. His temperament and philosophical outlook were out of sync with the then official school of thought, i.e., that of Chu Hsi. Wang's argument with the Chu school was thus a confrontation with the status quo. He never felt completely comfortable with the official Confucian conventions of the Ming court. In his criticism of Buddhism, Wang acted not

as an outsider but as one who has an affinity for the prevailing traditions; thus, his actions were in a way a form of self-criticism.

At the biographical level there are intriguing differences between Butler's and Wang's personalities and personal experiences. Rising steadily through the Anglican hierarchy to be the Bishop of Durham, second in rank only to the Bishop of Canterbury, Butler came across as the quintessential intellectual and ecclesiastical operator who moved effectively through the academic and political labyrinth. At the private level, Butler's personal moral quest reflected his public pronouncements and he was the embodiment of a "cool and reflective" life. During a debate in the House of Lords, Horace Walpole made this remark:

"The Bishop of Durham has been wafted to the See in a cloud of metaphysics and remained absorbed in it." (Butler, VI, p. xvii)

In his edition of Butler's work, J.H. Bernard included this description of Butler's demeanor:

"He was of a most reverend aspect; his face thin and pale; but there was a divine placidness in his countenance, which inspired veneration, and expressed the most benevolent mind. His white hair hung peacefully on his shoulders, and his whole figure was patriarchal." (Butler, VI, p. xvii)⁷⁰

Wang's biographical narrative is more dramatic and traumatic. His public career was marked with achievements and yet marred with controversy until the very end. The following poem captured his anguish over his public career.

"Not the least merit have I gained in the service of his aged and august majesty.
Helplessly I watch the graying of hair on my temples.
Han Hsin was surely never a true credit to his country,
While Shao Yung certainly was a hero among men.

The times are hard, and allow no ease:

⁷⁰ For more biographical accounts of Butler, see William J. Norton, *Bishop Butler: Moralism and Divine*, Introduction, p. 1-5 (1940) and Terence Penelhum, *Butler*, Introduction, p. 1-6 (1985).

No longer able to improve the state of affairs, I wish to keep my knife intact.
I go to seek my old place of retirement east of the Yueh waters,
In a thatched hut, high above the mountains, in the company of clouds.”

(quoted in Ching, 1976, p. 33)

Privately, his personal pursuit of the *Tao* was likewise tested by deep anguish. Once again his poetic sensibility most powerfully expressed the crests and troughs of that quest.

“Immortality – I covet in vain
Lacking pills and money
Famous mountains I have combed,
Till my temples yield silken hairs.
My light body fettered by (*nien*)
Daily move I farther from *Tao*.
Awakened suddenly, in middle age, I find
The Pills of Nine Returns,
No need for oven, nor for tripod:
Why seek I *k’an* and why *li*
No end is here, nor beginning,
So too, for birth and death –
The magicians’ wise words
Only increase my doubts;
Confusedly these old men
Transmit arts difficult and complex,
In me is *Tien* (Heaven), in me *K’un* (Earth)
I need not seek elsewhere –
The thousand sages pass as shadows,
Liang-chih alone is my guide.”

(quoted in Ching, 1976, p. 158)⁷¹

Chapter Conclusion

Christianity and Confucianism originated from very diverse historical locations. Since their earliest meeting in centuries past, significant efforts have been invested to understand and compare these two ancient moral traditions. Past scholarship has revealed that they share significant similarities and striking differences. This chapter’s comparison

⁷¹ For extra reading on Wang’s life, see Julie Ching, *To Acquire Wisdom: The Way of Wang Yang-ming*, chapter 1 (1976). For a closer study of the early years in Wang’s moral development,

of Butler and Wang has likewise revealed some parallels and variances in these two traditions.

Historically, Butler's 18th century England and Wang's 16th century Ming China could not have been more different in terms of their political and social structures. At the personal level, Butler and Wang likewise presented contrasting personalities. At the professional level, their experiences differed, with Butler enjoying a steady reign within the Anglican hierarchy while Wang's fate in the Ming establishment was prominent but precarious. In terms of temperament, Butler has been described as the "cool and reflective" English divine while Wang has been depicted as the passionate Buddhist-Confucianist.

Notwithstanding the differences in their historical and personal experiences, Butler's and Wang's advocacy of their respective Christian and Confucian traditions presented moral concepts with interesting similarities and critical differences. This comparison has shown that in spite of some palpable variations, the two thinkers upheld a common vision of a unified humanity, i.e., the harmonious co-existence of all people. Their explications of human nature also reveal distinct nuances, yet they believed that each individual is endowed with innate capability, autonomy, and dignity. Butler and Wang share a basic framework that assumes an objective order, though the content of the norms within that order remain contentious. Finally, they showed some common priorities but also some diverse approaches on how best to cultivate the moral self.

see Tu Wei Ming, *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action: Wang Yang-ming's Youth (1472 – 1509)* (1976).

Chapter 5 will examine the significance and implications of this comparative study of Butler and Wang. More specifically, I will explore how their similarities and differences can influence and inform the Christian and Confucian relationship and how these findings should inform the CRE methodological debate.

Chapter 5: Wang, Butler, and the Contemporary Challenges

Globalization is the 21st century's buzzword, a key topic in international trade, world economics, universal human rights, and much more. Never in history has humankind experienced a closer connectedness, and the momentum is moving towards even more integration across geography and cultures. One set of encounters that bears critical contemporary importance is the East-West, and specifically the Confucian-Christian, interactions. This relationship has attracted renewed attention with China's recent deft rehabilitation of Confucianism as a corollary form of soft power to supplement its increasing economic and political influence. It has raised the ante in China's competitive relations with the world at large, expanding potential points of conflict into the cultural sphere and even portending a possible clash of civilizations. This chapter is an examination of these contemporary challenges and a study of how Wang and Butler can inform today's state of affairs. I will draw on their works for insights into the intricacies of religious pluralism, in particular the relationship between the Confucian East and the Christian West (Part A). I close the chapter by revisiting the Comparative Religious Ethics (CRE) methodological debate and by contrasting my project with the models presented by Lee Yearley and David Little and Sumner B. Twiss (Part B).

A) Confucian-Christian Relationship

Infused with a new lease on life, Confucianism is now poised to occupy an influential space in the global moral community. The question of how it relates to the world's religions in general and Christianity in particular presents intriguing challenges. Do the two venerated traditions of Confucianism and Christianity share sufficient

commonality for a peaceable co-existence? Are their moral assumptions so diametrically divergent as to pose threats to each other's worldviews? To explore these questions, I plan to set Wang and Butler in a hypothetical encounter to examine how they would regard each other's project, and by proxy how the Confucian East and the Christian West could relate to each other.

A1) Wang's Assessment of Butler

To postulate how Wang would assess Butler's moral project, I begin with a reconsideration of Wang's response to the pluralistic context of 16th century Ming China. Chapter 3 showed that Wang approached this challenge from a framework consisting of two orders, primary and secondary. In the primary are values regarded as inviolable, the infringement of which results in severe penalty. The secondary represents important but supplementary norms whose violation may be tolerated. How Wang reacted to his diverse moral counterparts is governed principally by the primary order. Traditions are tolerated or prohibited depending on their compliance to or contravention of these values. For example, the Mohists' melancholic theory of human nature, in Wang's assessment, was an error of the primary order and was censured accordingly. In the case of Chu Hsi and the Buddhists, Wang, while perturbed by aspects of their viewpoints, considered their teachings as secondary aberrations, i.e., divergences that do not undermine the primary order. For this reason, they were accommodated and deemed as passable partners in the divine scheme. Wang, I showed, maintained a framework with a set of primary norms that guided him to include some as compatible and exclude others as discordant with the divine scheme.

The challenge at hand is to deduce whether Wang would judge Butler's moral project as conforming to the primary order and whether he would deem Christianity as congruent with the *Tao*. To do this, a hypothetical study of Wang's assessment of Butler will now be presented.

To start, Chapter 4 shows that Wang and Butler possess remarkable similarities in their moral outlooks. In these commonalities, Wang, I submit, could identify in Butler shared beliefs of vital importance. Three tenets in particular are noteworthy. The first is Butler's theistic vision (see Chapter 2, section A). The Chinese worldview has always been anchored on belief in a transcendent. For this reason, Wang would see Butler's vigorous defense of God as a crucial affirmation of the basic Confucian credo, i.e., revere the Heavens. The next tenet pertains to Butler's telos. It corresponds with Wang's rendition of the *Tao* as *Tien's* desire for humankind to co-exist as one harmonious family (see Chapter 4, section A2). Wang, I argue, would applaud Butler's similar Christian vision of the quest for the good of all humanity. And finally Wang would find affinity in Butler's theory of human nature. He would endorse the latter's refutation of Hobbes and see in Butler an important reaffirmation of human moral capability. In Butler, I submit, Wang would recognize a set of vitally important shared moral assumptions.

To be sure, the two thinkers also have striking differences in their respective worldviews (see Chapter 4). Some of these could posit considerable challenges for Wang. One underlying and conspicuous contention pertains to the disparity in their descriptions of the divine order, i.e., Wang's plain rendition against Butler's intricate elucidation (see Chapter 4, section A). Wang, I believe, would critique Butler's portrayal of God as being

overly speculative. Some of the latter's pronouncements, e.g., on Christ's incarnation, the Trinity, and the afterlife, could, in Wang's view, be deemed as bordering on myth. Beyond these larger disputes are other more subtle differences that may present further points of conflict. Wang, for instance, would criticize Butler's comparatively weaker attention to the dialectic of *li* and *jen* (form and spirit), which might cause Christians to be more susceptible to the fault of insincerity (see Chapter 4, sections B3.2 and E1.2). Wang could also raise objections over the Christian church's overextended role in self-cultivation, seeing it as undermining the traditional family unit (see Chapter 4, section E2.2). Notwithstanding these additional probable disagreements, Wang's main reservation with Butler, I submit, would ultimately be tied to the exclusive claims of Christianity to Special Revelation (SR). SR-inspired pronouncements on the divine order would be, in Wang's view, too esoteric. Thus, he would also be perturbed by aspects of Butler's Christian moral vision.

Wang would see in Butler certain reassuring similarities but also some disconcerting differences. How would he reconcile these shared values as well as disparities with Butler? In the first instance, I suggest that Wang would judge those common beliefs identified above as indicating Butler's compliance with Confucianism's primary order. And then more significantly, I argue, he would treat the discords with Butler, specifically the Christian's SR claims, as secondary deviations. That is to say, these speculative excesses do not undermine the primary order. For this reason, he would be critical of some of Butler's pronouncements but would yet regard the Christian project as fundamentally sound and compatible with the *Tao*.

This proposition has historical premises. Wang's relationship with the Buddhists is a case in point. The Confucians' main argument with Buddhism was the latter's over-reliance on extra-rational religious perceptions that result in the neglect of social responsibilities. Nevertheless, one notes that Wang's reprimands of the Buddhists were relatively restrained compared to those he meted out against the Mohists. This was because the Mohists' theory of human nature was judged by Wang to be an error of the primary order and was thus censured accordingly. The Buddhists' excesses, however, were treated as secondary deviations. And for this reason they were generally tolerated by Wang and the Confucian tradition as a whole. Butler's case, I submit, has some parallels with that of the Buddhists. For starters, the perceived flaw in Butler is not unlike that of the Buddhists, i.e., excessive confidence in dispensing certain pronouncements on the divine order. And like the Buddhists, Butler's deviation may also be regarded as of the secondary order. As discussed earlier, the case for the Buddhists' status was made by contrasting them with the Mohists. That is to say the Buddhists' error was not of the same magnitude as that of the Mohists and hence was tolerated. Chapter 2 presented Butler's critique of Hobbes and Chapter 4 revealed remarkable similarities in Hobbes and Mo Tzu's viewpoints, especially their melancholic theory of human nature. Based on these corresponding facts, I submit it is reasonable to infer that Wang would not fault Butler for committing wrongs that are of the same magnitude as the Mohists, i.e., primary violations. Therefore, as with the Buddhists, he would treat Butler's flaws as secondary deviations. I thus surmise that there is historical basis to postulate that Wang would accommodate Butler's views. If the Buddhists' excesses are tolerated, then it is reasonable to suggest that Wang would accord similar acceptance to Butler's SR-based Christian worldview.

In sum, Wang would experience some distinct trepidation over aspects of Butler's moral assumptions, particular the SR-related proclamations. Nevertheless, he would also see in Butler deeply shared values considered to be foundational to any moral order. Therefore, I submit that there is conceptual justification and also historical precedence to assert that Wang would regard Butler's project as essentially sound and would deem the English bishop to be a worthy player in realizing the *Tao*.

A2) Butler's Assessment of Wang

To explore how Butler would in turn evaluate Wang, I will also begin with a review of Butler's responses to 18th century English pluralism. Chapter 2 showed that Butler's reaction was informed by two sets of categories. The first pair is the aforementioned primary and secondary orders. The second set is unique to Butler, i.e., the classification of religion into natural and revealed types. Through natural religion, one discerns God's rudimentary design for humankind. But it is revealed religion that supplies the details and fuller rendition of God's divine scheme. Therefore, knowledge derived from natural religion alone is incomplete without the supplement of revealed religion. Even so, for Butler, natural religion's precepts represent knowledge that is essential for any moral order. For this reason, these natural principles are treated as being of the primary order and revealed religion's insights, i.e., SR, notwithstanding its special status, are regarded as secondary norms (see Chapter 2, section E4.2). How Butler views the world's diverse moral traditions is then governed chiefly by the primary, natural religion criteria. Moral traditions are tolerated or prohibited contingent upon their compliance with or contravention of these natural principles. For instance, Hobbes's

melancholic theory of human nature was judged to be a violation of the primary order and was hence censured accordingly. On the other hand, Butler disagreed with various aspects of the Deist and Wesleyan viewpoints, but these were deemed secondary deviations, i.e., they did not unduly compromise the norms of natural religion. For this reason they were accommodated, albeit with some reservations, as partners in the divine scheme. Butler, I have shown, operates with a two-tiered framework: the primary representing natural religion's principles and the secondary containing among other things revealed religion's norms. This enabled him to include some traditions and exclude others from the divine scheme (see Chapter 2, sections E2 and E4.2).

The next task is to assess whether Butler would regard Wang's Confucian tradition as compatible with the *telos*. More specifically, I examine whether Wang's project complies with Butler's primary, natural religion criteria.

To begin with, I submit that Butler would recognize in Wang some shared core values. Three doctrines specifically are of vital importance. The first is Wang's stance on the transcendent. For Butler, the theistic presupposition is the anchor of any human order. Hence, Wang's exhortation to revere *Tien* would be in Butler's view an important affirmation to counter the emerging atheism he saw in 18th century England. The next tenet pertains to Wang's *Tao*, conceptualized as the quest for a common humanity. This comports with Butler's *telos*, which envisions all humankind, as God's children, regardless of ethnicity or race, on a pilgrimage towards harmonious co-existence (see Chapter 4, section A2). Butler, I suggest, would regard Wang's moral vision as affirming this divine goal. The final precept relates to Wang's theory of human nature. As

mentioned above, Wang's rebuttal of Mo Tzu contains intriguing similarities with Butler's refutation of Hobbes, namely, a rejection of the melancholy perception of the human person (see Chapter 4, section F1). Butler would also regard Wang's theory as seconding the critical Christian doctrine of human innate moral capability. In these tenets, Butler would, I surmise, recognize in Wang important common core beliefs.

Without question, Butler and Wang also have significant differences. Some of these divergences would cause Butler serious consternation. One obvious contention pertains to the disparity in their descriptions of the divine order, i.e., Butler's elaborate descriptions against Wang's bare interpretations (see Chapter 4, section A). Butler, I believe, would critique Wang's portrayal (or the lack thereof) of *Tien* and the heavenly scheme as being too mundane. Beyond this main reservation are other differences that could posit additional points of disagreement. For example, Butler might take issue with Wang's emphasis on concentric circles that give priority to one's innermost relationships, regarding this as feeding parochialism (see Chapter 4, section E3.2). Butler could also criticize Wang's extensive employment of rituals encompassing the religious and civil realms as excessive and as stifling creativity (see Chapter 4, section E1.2). In spite of these additional possible contentions, the issue that would most concern Butler, I submit, is Wang's comparatively bland and uninspired elucidation of the heavenly scheme. Therefore, Butler would indeed be perturbed by aspects of Wang's Confucian project.

Considering both his vital affinity and also serious consternations with Wang's views, how would Butler resolve this dialectic? To begin, he would take their shared beliefs as a sign of Wang's compliance with the primary order. That is to say,

Confucianism is a moral tradition that meets the criteria of natural religion. Then on contentious issues, specifically Wang's mundane moral outlook, Butler could treat the problem as essentially a Confucian lack of SR, a secondary deficiency that does not undermine the primary order. Therefore, in Butler's assessment Wang's project is deficient on account of SR but fundamentally sound for its compliance with natural religion's criteria. And for this reason, I submit, Butler would accommodate Confucianism as passable regarding the pursuit of the *telos*.

This hypothesis has historical justifications. Butler's dealing with Deism is an apt example. The Deists were chastised for their irreverent dismissal of SR. Yet one notices a milder tone in Butler's rebuke of the Deists vis-à-vis that vented against Hobbes. Hobbes's theory of human nature, in Butler's account, presents a more serious offence that violated the primary norms and hence warranted a harsher penalty. By contrast, the Deists' skeptical disregard of SR was deemed a secondary fault, that is to say it did not violate natural religion's criteria. For this reason, in spite of some pointed criticisms, Butler generally accommodated the Deists. Wang's case, I suggest, has analogous features with that of the Deists. In the first instance, like the Deists, Wang's deficiency is related to the lack of SR. He is also not guilty of a primary order violation. As discussed above, the case for the Deists' standing was made by contrasting them with Hobbes; that is to say the Deists' error was not of Hobbes's severity and was hence tolerated by Butler. I have discussed Wang's refutation of Mo Tzu (Chapter 3) and also described how Mo Tzu and Hobbes shared surprisingly similar assumptions on human nature (Chapter 4). These parallel facts, I submit, offer plausible ground to conjecture that Butler would not charge Wang with Hobbesian types of errors, i.e., those of the primary order. And as with

the Deists, he could treat Wang's deficiencies as secondary and acknowledge Confucianism as meeting the natural religion criteria. If Butler accommodated the Deists in spite of their shortcomings, there is good reason to assume a similar acceptance would be extended to the Confucians. Indeed, there is additional historical evidence to support this assumption. As mentioned previously, Butler made reference to those "most learned, polite nations" of the East (see Chapter 2, section E4.2.3) and I have argued that this is suggestive of Butler's broadly conciliatory view of Eastern moral traditions, presumably including Confucianism. I thus surmise that there is historical precedent for supposing Butler's toleration of Wang.

To summarize, Butler's main concern with Wang's project is the latter's want of SR. Nevertheless, he would identify in Wang vital shared values that affirm the criteria of natural religion. For this reason, I submit that there is conceptual basis and historical justification that Butler would accept Wang's Confucianism as fundamentally sound and compatible with the quest for the telos.

Conclusions

Wang and Butler would have reservations about each other, e.g., Wang faulting Butler's Christianity as being too speculative and Butler critiquing Wang's Confucianism as overly mundane. Notwithstanding these criticisms, I believe that they would regard each other's project as essentially sound and receive each other as partners in the common quest for the telos or *Tao*. I thus submit that Wang and Butler present us with a plausible model for the contemporary Confucian and Christian relationship, one that acknowledges the critical differences that remain between the two traditions yet at the

same time recognizes their shared core moral concepts. For this reason, Confucians and Christians today, in spite of certain secondary reservations, have strong justification to regard each other as fellow sojourners in the quest for an harmonious global order.

B) The CRE Methodological Debate

This dissertation has presented a descriptive analysis and comparison of the moral vision of Butler and moral vision of Wang and an illustration of how they would envision a hypothetical Christian-Confucian encounter. The goal of this study is to enhance our understanding of Butler's Christianity and Wang's Confucianism specifically and, more generally, the similarities and differences in diverse religious traditions. In order to highlight this project's contributions to CRE and for perspectives in relation to other existing research, I now contrast this dissertation with two influential CRE works: Yearley's *Aquinas and Mencius* (1992) and Little and Twiss's *Comparative Religious Ethics* (1978).

I focus this comparison on the moral self, specifically the emphasis we place on the thin and thick dimensions of personhood. The thin dimension, broadly defined, constitutes the basic expectation of what it is to be a human, for example, the principle that all able-bodied people ought to save a child fallen into a well. These rudimentary prerequisites of what characterizes a moral person are assumed and affirmed universally by diverse traditions. The thick dimension constitutes the additional (or maximum) expectation of personhood par excellence, for example, the ideal of an accomplished life as a good father, devoted daughter, diligent teacher, wise judge, etc. These involve the

deeper pursuit of what it is to be a “whole” human being, and diverse cultures have varied renditions of what constitutes a “flourishing” moral self.

I intend to show that Yearley, Little and Twiss, and this project all recognize the thin and thick dimensions yet place differing emphases on these dual aspects of personhood. Yearley’s project affirms the two-tiered self and argues that the more important comparison is to be had at the thick level. While not explicitly discounting the thin, his project has the inevitable effect of sidelining it as simplistic and insignificant. Drawing on Butler and Wang, I argue that the thin is as critical as the thick in the understanding of the moral self. Little and Twiss’s project likewise affirms a two-tiered personhood and seeks to give each part an equal accounting. They are effective with regard to the thin, especially in highlighting a key set of moral values that forms the basic component of the moral person. Their efforts in elucidating the thick dimension, however, have been met with criticism. In this regard, my work presents a more nuanced account of the thick moral self and is hence an improvement on Little and Twiss’s effort.

A) Yearley

Yearley’s *Aquinas and Mencius* is widely recognized as setting the benchmark for comparative religious studies in general and for the comparison of Christian and Confucian ethics in particular. While I intend to advance a modest critique, my study does affirm much of Yearley’s basic methodology.

A1) General Framework

For Yearley, Aquinas and Mencius' moral orders are organized around three sets of theories, namely, primary, practical, and secondary. In this dissertation I showed that Butler and Wang operate out of a two-tiered order, i.e., the primary and the secondary. Yearley and this project's descriptions of the general framework of moral traditions have certain similarities and also differences.

To begin, there are some resemblances in the categories used. The primary theories, Yearley explains, represent challenges of the day-to-day type and are shared across cultures. The secondary theories represent human responses arising out of extraordinary exigencies. These are in general esoteric and their contents differ radically in diverse human traditions (see Chapter 1, section B). My analysis of Butler and Wang supports Yearley's theories. As explained earlier, I defined the primary order as maintaining values and beliefs derived from the more determinate challenges. For instance, Butler and Wang regard the need to respond compassionately toward a distressed child as an unambiguous moral imperative. It is a general moral principle that is understood universally and this I suggest corresponds with Yearley's primary theories. The secondary order contains values and beliefs derived from the less determinate challenges. One example is the elucidation of the divine order by Butler and Wang. I have shown that they presented narratives that are at times esoteric and their accounts of God and *Tien* do differ radically. These findings, I submit, support Yearley's definition of the secondary theories.

While many similarities are evident, there is one important difference. Butler's and Wang's primary and secondary norms, I have argued, also denote a hierarchical order.

Again, the primary for both thinkers represents norms that are foundational to the moral order, where no allowance for compromise is made. Secondary values and beliefs are important, but they are regarded as less critical, hence there is tolerance for diverse viewpoints. In Yearley's work there is no specific illustration of such an order. In the first instance, he does not present his primary and secondary theories in terms of a differentiated authority. Second, in his extensive analysis of Aquinas and Mencius, he does not deal explicitly with the subject of authority, i.e., how conflicting norms are resolved and prioritized.

One other difference between the two projects is Yearley's distinctive notion of practical theories, designated as including cases straddling between the primary and secondary norms. Yearley explains that these are mid-level exigencies that allow people to respond with a more concrete application of the primary theories' general principles while appealing to the secondary theories without invoking their full-fledged esotericism. My study does not formally categorize such challenges but there is evidence from Butler and Wang to support Yearley's thesis. An apt example is the instinctive sympathy we feel for a distressed child. According to Butler and Wang, humans by nature are endowed with innate compassion and one merely needs to tap into it to conjure an appropriate response. To be sure, an appeal to a higher divine power involving a thicker account of the Christian God or the Confucian *Tien* could supplement some people's resolve to act. Yet for Butler and Wang the capacity for compassion is natural. That is to say all persons, with or without invoking a thicker description of divine power, can be moved to perform certain outstanding moral actions. This natural capacity for compassion, I submit, corresponds with Yearley's description of the practical theories.

A2) *The Thick Self*

Yearley's main methodological point was to direct comparative study to the practical theories. The primary and secondary theories are potential subjects for comparison, yet for Yearley the similarities in the primary theories offer only a thin account of the moral self, thus producing findings that are not of much significance, while the diverse secondary theories present such deep divergences that attempts to find commonalities will yield no meaningful results. It is with the practical theories that fruitful comparison can be had. At this level, human moral deliberation in general, and as verified by Aquinas and Mencius in particular, constitutes what Yearley termed the thicker account of human flourishing. It is here where the similarities present more substantive content and the differences are not too dissimilar for meaningful comparison. (Yearley, 1990, p. 180). I concur with Yearley's main thesis and will advance two sets of arguments in support of the view that the thick dimension presents opportunities for intriguing comparisons.

I first submit that the thin and thick differentiation is discernable in Butler and Wang. Their projects' common goal is to cultivate the ideal Christian and *chun-tzu*. In this quest, they take a prioritized approach where the primary goal is to ensure that people meet certain basic requirements pertaining to the more determinate challenges; for example, all are expected to affirm and revere God and *Tien*. Beyond these, Butler and Wang were less stern with regard to a second set of expectations associated with the less determinate exigencies where people can achieve only ambivalent and at times contentious responses; for example, what are the specific features and characteristics of

God and *Tien*? At this level, Butler's and Wang's concern is to ensure that a person achieves the best probable response and competency. The two-tiered primary and secondary priorities of Butler and Wang, I submit, correspond to the thin and thick differentiation. The primary priority in the more determinate cases represents the thin norms that are general and universal, while the secondary priority in the less determinate cases represents the thick challenges that are specific and contextual.

My project concurs with Yearley's main assertion that comparison at the level of thicker practical theories does produce more exciting findings.

At the thin level, my analysis of the primary, more determinate cases showed that people are expected to conform to a set of clearly defined standards; for example, all able-bodied persons are expected to save a child fallen into a well. With these challenges, the diverse traditions speak in one voice and in this sense they offer no intriguing variations or new insights. As for the thicker, secondary, less determinate cases, my examination revealed more complicated and interesting outcomes. For instance, in the case of a person compelled to act with exceptional bravery to rescue a child fallen into rapids, the diverse traditions' descriptions of the motivations and mechanics that propel such acts differ significantly. Yearley's exegesis has shown how Aquinas and Mencius presented nuanced understandings of the development of moral courage. I have also identified, to use Yearley's phrasing, similarities in differences and differences in similarities in the way that Butler and Wang would conceptualize such extraordinary acts. At the outset are two shared features. First, in such emergencies, both thinkers recognized that people may be compelled to respond without assurance of the outcome. One is

moved by faith (Christian) and conviction (Confucian) to know what is the right deed and to act with the hope that the desired result will be realized. Second, for Butler and Wang this capability to act at times against the interests of one's own wellbeing is empowered by a source outside the self, i.e., the transcendent.

Beyond these similarities, however, are important nuances. The first distinction is in their conceptions of the transcendent, which take different forms. As already discussed in chapter 4, the Christian God is highly personalized and described through an elaborate historical narrative. By contrast, the Confucian *Tien* is characterized in a bare, abstract form, with minimal personal and historical descriptions. The second distinction is found in their supporting narratives regarding the motivation to action. The Christian account of the afterlife, with assurance of a final judgment where ultimate justice is exacted, presents powerful imagery that enables a person to act with anticipation of a higher reward in the next life and without regard for present-life consequences. The Confucian doctrine of *Tien* does envision some form of ultimate justice, but in contrast to the Christian version, the Confucian account is Stoic in nature, with the barest narrative of how the drama of the afterlife will unfold. The Christian narrative appears to present a more elaborate storyline to console and reconcile present-life uncertainties.

In sum, my study of the responses of Butler and Wang to the less determinate cases confirms Yearley's assertion that comparison at the thick level provides illuminating similarities and differences.

A3) The Thin Self

By all accounts, Yearley's study of Aquinas and Mencius is an impressive in-depth analysis of the Christian and Confucian renditions of human flourishing. Yearley's aim was to underscore the need for careful contextual study of the thick dimension of moral traditions. The exalted universal, general moral principles, i.e., be compassionate, be kind, etc., represent, in Yearley's parlance, only the "minimal" expectation of "mere humanity."

I agree that the thin indeed does not fully account for the wholeness of a moral person and the thick does provide for more interesting comparative analysis. Nevertheless, Yearley's reiteration of the thick, by design or default, has the effect of unduly sidelining the thin dimension. And his statement of the primary theories' similarities appears to further diminish the importance of the thin.

"Resemblances, of course, also are present in some areas. Many of them, however, are *real but thin*; that is, the resemblances are rather insignificant. They appear in an area that is so narrowly circumscribed or at a level that is so abstract that they provide us neither textured nor extensive materials on which to work." (Yearley, 1990, p. 171).

Yearley's seeming dismissal of the thin similarities as insignificant is unwarranted. To fix one's focus solely on the thick and ignore the thin, in my opinion, is to commit the same mistake of not fully accounting for the whole person, this time by neglecting the thin. The thin, I argue, is an equally critical part of the human self.

As presented in Chapters 2 and 3, Butler's and Wang's moral projects take a prioritized approach, first to ensure basic competence on the primary, determinate thin cases and then to nurture the more complex skills required for the secondary, less determinate thick cases. This two-tiered framework conveys two critical points. The first is the already discussed axiom that the cultivated person is one who possesses the skills

to deal with both the basic and the more complex challenges of life; in other words, he or she is competent in the thin and thick accounts of morality. The second and more important point concerns the stages of growth. Butler's and Wang's ultimate goal is to nurture a flourishing person, and to reach this goal there is a sequence of development. One must have, in the first instance and at the very least, a set of basic skills and competency in the more determinate/thin cases. It is upon these basic skills that the more advanced thick skills are developed. If people are incapable of responding correctly to the "normal" challenges, there is less likelihood that they would respond appropriately to extraordinary exigencies. Thus, for Butler and Wang the basic skills are fundamental. They may appear mundane, yet they form the foundation of a person's moral character and capability. To attain the higher goal, one has to master the basic skills.

Butler's and Wang's concerns for the basic, thin norms were reinforced by their conceptual debates with their adversaries. In overseeing their moral cultivation programs, their main worry was to ensure that people developed sound conceptual knowledge. And one key doctrine they sought to defend was the sanguine interpretation of human nature. To that end, they made considerable efforts to refute Hobbes and the Mohists' melancholy view of human nature, a view both Butler and Wang took to be deeply erroneous. In the first instance, the quarrel over human nature may seem to be stating the obvious and thus trivial. Yet for Butler and Wang, failure to establish the proper perspective could disorient one's moral compass. Unless people maintain a correct view of their fellow humans, their innate compassion for others may be eroded and their conscience may become misguided and buried. For example, a person who fails to maintain the basic view of their fellow human as kindred will fail to act responsibly and

impartially to the needs of others. While the basic doctrine of human dignity may appear thin, for Butler and Wang it is not insignificant. Therefore, in order for a person to mature into the thick moral self, he or she must be firmly anchored in these thin foundations.

In summation, according to Yearley's account the comparative exercise must not be content with a simple comparison of the thin. The cross-cultural endeavor ought to move beyond the clear similarities into the messier and thicker dimension of moral traditions. Nevertheless, to fully understand the whole, I argue, the thin should not be neglected either. Careful study of both the thin and the thick is indispensable to comprehending the fullness of humanity. As a matter of fact, it is right to say that the thin, though representing the basic dimension, is even more important because it is foundational to the moral self and moral traditions.

B) Little and Twiss

Little and Twiss's *Comparative Religious Ethics*, published in 1978, became an influential catalyst for the subsequent CRE methodological debate. While I plan to present my project as an improvement, my study does affirm much of their approach.

B1) General Framework

Little and Twiss's main thesis is that diverse religious traditions share certain patterns of moral reflection. Moral deliberation is guided by a justification system consisting of validation and vindication procedures. My comparative project on Butler and Wang does not seek to confirm the specifics of Little and Twiss's justification system,

but it does endorse their general point that there are common patterns of moral reflection and that these are discernible in the ethical thought processes of Butler and Wang.

Chapter 4 showed that Butler's and Wang's moral traditions share important parallels. Their diagnoses of moral challenges can be divided into the more determinate and less determinate categories. I then systematized Butler's and Wang's ethical frameworks, showing that they operated with a set of prima facie truths and appealed to consequences and deontological duty as means of justification for moral decisions and actions. I also analyzed their engagement with their moral opponents, who presented analogous challenges. In the first instance, Butler and Wang were concerned with Hobbes and the Mohists, respectively, for advocating what they regarded as erroneous interpretations of nature in general and human nature in particular. The two thinkers then faced another common moral dilemma, the dialectic of reason and sense. Butler's refutation of the Deists and Wesley and Wang's critique of Chu and the Buddhists reflected their shared concern about the need to mitigate the at-times competing powers of the rational and the emotional.

In summation, my study shows important similarities in Butler's and Wang's moral concepts and concerns, confirming Little and Twiss's thesis that diverse moral traditions share patterns in moral reflection.

B2) The Thin Self

Little and Twiss's project has identified patterns in diverse traditions, i.e., the moral-religious dichotomy, a justification system, and a set of fixed moral values. While

not their central thesis, Little and Twiss's most important contribution, I submit, is their identification of those inviolable norms assumed in diverse traditions. In addition to showing that diverse traditions operate with a set of core values, they also reveal that the content of these values share important similarities across diverse traditions. My examination of Butler and Wang confirms Little and Twiss's finding. I showed that Butler and Wang also operated with a set of fixed values and that there are noteworthy commonalities in the contents of their moral systems.

What are the significance and implications of this finding? Though not explicitly stated in Little and Twiss's work, I submit that they might affirm these semblances as positing the basis and possibility for a cross-cultural common morality.

In the first part of this chapter, I constructed a hypothetical study of Butler and Wang, and by proxy the Christian and Confucian relationship. I argued that these two thinkers, despite some important reservations, would tolerate each other as moral equals. I developed this thesis around the thin and thick categories of moral values. The key lies in the thin values that Butler and Wang regarded as foundational to the moral self and moral tradition. These core values shaped their relationship with other traditions, providing the critical criteria to ascertain who is to be tolerated or prohibited. They recognized that not all will measure up and did not expect all to measure up to their thicker vision of the moral self. Nevertheless, they did expect all to at least abide by the thin values that form the prerequisite of mere humanity. They affirmed and tolerated a thin version of the moral self, specifically towards those outside of their traditions. And Butler and Wang would tolerate each other's views on the basis of their thin

commonalities, though they would hold reservations about the thicker renderings of their moral visions.

B3) The Thick Self

Little and Twiss's project played a critical role in drawing attention to the core values shared by diverse traditions. They implied that these represent only the thin prerequisite of mere humanity and that traditions have denser renditions of morality; nevertheless, their critics have faulted them for failing to account for these nuances and providing a balanced analysis of the thin and thick.

In this regard this project may be viewed as an improvement in that I set out to give equal attention to the thin and thick dimensions of morality. My hypothetical study of the relationship between Butler and Wang focused on their thin similarities. I also argued that they would have serious reservations concerning each other's thicker rendition of morality, and I gave considerable space to enunciating the thick differences that set Butler and Wang apart.

In Chapter 4, I showed that Butler and Wang had fundamental semblances and critical divergences. At the heart of their moral visions is the shared affirmation of the transcendent, yet their descriptions of the divine could not be more different. The Christian in general presents a highly elaborate narrative of God compared with the Confucian's spartan account of *Tien* (Chapter 4, section A). I then analyzed the differences in the cultivation projects of Butler and Wang (Chapter 4, section E). Both thinkers I showed placed different emphasis in their deployment of the study and spiritual

programs in moral character developments and virtue cultivations. One example is the greater weight the Confucian placed on civil rites vis-à-vis the Christian primary focus on religious rituals. Furthermore I explained that while external institutions, namely the church and the academy, provide critical oversight, their roles are defined differently. The Christian church's responsibility is all-encompassing, attending to the parishioners' intellectual, spiritual, and personal wellbeing. The Confucian academy functions more akin to a think tank and relies on the immediate family as the focus of moral development. The historical and personal differences between Butler and Wang were also examined (Chapter 4, section G). While both were moral teachers and leaders in their respective contexts, their social and political standings in England and Ming China and their personalities differed remarkably.

In summation, my comparative study of Butler and Wang confirms Little and Twiss's thesis that diverse moral traditions share important patterns in moral reflection. My project also affirms Little and Twiss's identification of a set of fixed core values considered fundamental to the moral self and moral traditions. Beyond these shared thin values, I also showed that Butler's and Wang's moral project do have specific differences in their approach to moral character development and virtue cultivation. Thus my research presents a more extensive examination of the thicker dimension of moral traditions than does Little and Twiss's analysis.

C) Conclusion

In today's reality of increased cross-cultural encounters, the need to construct a shared moral framework has taken on greater urgency. To be sure, the normative task of

identifying binding values across different moral traditions is an intricate and delicate endeavor. One faces the danger of imposing undue standards upon others. Conversely, one is also confronted with the risk of failing to recognize legitimate values. This dissertation is set in the context of this quest for a global ethical order. My project's contribution to this effort, however, is indirect. The goal is to present a fuller descriptive account of Butler's Christianity and Wang's Confucianism that may then be applied to the subsequent normative task of ascertaining the common ethical standards. Therefore, this dissertation is a contribution to CRE scholarship at the descriptive level. Specifically, it seeks to recommend a modest improvement to Yearley and Little and Twiss's influential works. With regard to Yearley, my study has sought to elevate the importance of the thin, universal commonalities in diverse traditions. In relation to Little and Twiss, this project presents a fuller account of the thicker dimension of human flourishing.

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