



The Differences Between Confucian and Mencian Contingency¹

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Abstract: The concept of “quan bian 权变”, which can be translated as contingency, has been referred to achieving adaptability in Confucian Classics. In order to practice wisdom, both Confucius and Mencius emphasize contingency along with the principle of “zhong yong 中庸”, which is the main form of adhering to the golden mean. However, they disagree on internal and external motives of enhancing self-cultivation. Confucian thought prioritizes that virtues are acquired by learning to conform to the traditional norms, while Mencian thought prioritizes that virtues are emerged by knowing the natural values. This kind of disagreement is undoubtedly concerned with the differences in their human nature theories. Unlike Confucian theory that highlights inherently similar nature, Mencian theory proclaims inherently good nature. Since Confucius and Mencius have opponent views about innate characteristics, explanations referring to moral ethics specifically indicate postnatal education where the motives are separated into internal and external ones. This paper will discuss the role of contingency in Confucian and Mencian philosophy by considering the statements that reveal the possibilities and impossibilities of moral adaptability.

Keywords: Confucianism, Contingency, Adaptability, Moral Ethics, Self-Cultivation

Introduction

Early Confucianism mostly explains the principles of practicing wisdom. By establishing an ideological system, Confucius (551-479 BC) was a prominent philosopher owing to his sociopolitical views. The teachings of Confucius were deeply

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rooted in the old tradition which takes precedence over social duties and responsibilities.² Following the golden mean has possibly been the essence of his traditional doctrine but continuing the golden mean has certainly been the touchstone of his normative moral approach. Accordingly, Confucius introduced some virtues such as benevolence (ren 仁)³ and righteousness (yi 义), recommending appropriateness in a standardized manner that conforms to etiquette (li 礼). In his *Analects* 4.15, we can find out that social relationships are attributed to the rules of reciprocity (zhongshu 忠恕).⁴ Reciprocity is the theoretical premise of Confucian ethical values, which subsume the emotions, thoughts, words and deeds of human beings. In the same chapter, Confucius also defines his own doctrine as the unity of consistency.⁵ So, the interaction between consistency and reciprocity may be read as the normative regulation of human behaviors. In this sense, we can say that Confucian golden mean is presented through reciprocal relations in the family and community.

After nearly two centuries, Mencius (372-289 BC) widely developed and promoted Confucian teachings along with psychological arguments. In this way, the meaning of some virtues such as benevolence, righteousness and etiquette has been redefined. Since Mencius thinks that human beings innately have good virtues, the golden mean has also been explained in a nonnormative way in order to put emphasis on self-awareness. In Mencius 2a.6, we can examine that the sense of compassion is the seed of benevolence, the sense of shame is the seed of righteousness, and the sense of deference is the seed of etiquette. Assuming human beings are naturally capable of moral values by the agency of intuitive ability (liang neng 良能) and intuitive knowledge (liang zhi 良知), Mencius believes that everyone has innate tendencies to emerge virtue and knowledge (Sertdemir, 2022). Therefore, Mencian wisdom seems

² Confucianism has been defined as dominating the thought and behavior of Chinese intellectuals and the general masses alike (Liu, 2006: 24). Furthermore, Amy Olberding has pointed out that “Of philosophers, historically and globally, there are none who compare to the Confucians for a passionate commitment to manners and civility” (Olberding, 2019: 49). As Peimin Ni says, “Confucius’ teachings are mostly instructions about *how* rather than descriptions about *what*” (Ni, 2017: 25). So, it can be seen that moral discussions of Confucianism are more about self-practical commitment, rather than theorized concepts, and Confucian morality is more about how to educate humankind into moral goodness (Hu and Pu, 2024: 171).

³ The term “ren 仁” can also be translated as humaneness.

⁴ Chinese zhong (忠) and shu (恕), which identify the guiding principle of reciprocity, have been the golden rule of Confucian teachings.

⁵ The unity of consistency (yi yi guan zhi 一以贯之) is a Chinese idiom referred to one principle pervading all things from beginning to end.



to be quite different from the rules put forth by Confucius. Moreover, Confucian teaching exemplifies the golden mean as the main principle of reciprocity while Mencian teaching exemplifies the golden mean as the main principle of morality.⁶

Mencius, despite being the most influential follower and interpreter of Confucian doctrines, contextualized moral responsibility quite differently from Confucius. Given the fact that they have different suggestions on social and political cohesion, we should note that their statements about moral adaptability also have some disagreements. In particular, their theories regarding the essence of human nature pave the way for discussion of how they explain the core of contingency. Both Confucius' theory of similar nature and Mencius' theory of good nature have their own rationality and subtlety. However, the expressions of sameness and goodness indicate that self-cultivation is evaluated from two different perspectives (Liang, 2010).⁷ Besides, since the methods of learning knowledge and virtue are not the same, moral adaptability is also described in two different ways: internally and externally. So, this paper aims to clarify the implied meaning of Confucian and Mencian contingencies with reference to classical Chinese texts to sort out which one is more flexible to enhance self-cultivation.

1. Confucius' Idea of Contingency

To understand Confucian conceptualization of contingency, we should examine Confucius' statement that claims human beings are similar in nature but distant in practice.⁸ This statement may serve as clear evidence of how Confucius describes innate tendencies that are neither defined as good nor bad. Similarity in nature means a neutral birth, having equal and essential attributes of existence without specifying goodness and badness. On the other hand, distance in practice means behavioral learning due to the differences of environmental influences on feelings, thoughts and habits. So, Confucius' argument clearly distinguishes endowed characteristics from learned characteristics. In another statement, we can read that human beings who

⁶ All the translations from Chinese, not otherwise cited, are our own. For further information, see Liji, 31.13; *Mencius*, 7a.26.

⁷ These two different perspectives are related to two distinct ways of learning: self-reflective and self-restrictive (Xu, 2016). Confucius' self-restrictive way of learning is a part of his normative approach to cultivating moral character. On the other hand, Mencius' self-reflective way of learning is a part of his intuitive approach to cultivating moral character.

⁸ In *Analects* 17.2, Confucius says, "By nature, humans are nearly alike; by practice, humans are entirely different."



have superior knowledge and inferior ignorance can never change.⁹ Confucius believes that human nature is neither good nor bad, but the influence of education and the environment can lead to some differences in learning knowledge and virtue. Most importantly, he highlights the differences between people due to class-based inequality, saying:

“Those who know from birth belong to the highest class. Those who know after learning belong to the second class. Those who learn despite confusion and exhaustion belong to the third class, and those who refuse to learn despite confusion and exhaustion belong to the lowest class” (*Analects*, 16.9).

Here, Confucius remarks on ways of learning from the perspective of individual efforts and social circumstances. Those who are born with knowledge are both superior and noble, and they are able to know without learning. Those who have knowledge after learning are able to enrich themselves through self-cultivation. They can realize the negativity of ignorance and then eagerly endeavor to learn. Those who learn despite confusion and exhaustion are able to dedicate themselves to learning when encountering difficulties. This means that they learn as long as they need to use knowledge in order to solve their own problems. Nevertheless, those who refuse to learn despite confusion and exhaustion are not able to achieve self-cultivation. So, it can be basically concluded that they always have inferior ignorance.

Apart from the ways of learning, we can also read Confucius' educational practice based on teaching methods. In *Analects* 6.21, he says, “Advanced knowledge can be taught to those whose qualifications are above mediocrity, but advanced knowledge cannot be taught to those whose qualifications are below mediocrity.” As it is seen, Confucius repeatedly mentions the differences between people, and such an argument enables us to generalize that each individual has different cognitive and affective learning abilities, except for those who have superior knowledge and inferior ignorance. To Confucius, superior knowledge is the root of goodness and inferior ignorance is the root of badness. Morally speaking, Confucius recommends the regulative effect of practice for people who are able to learn. To cultivate oneself in morality, one should recognize their own shortcomings. This process can be

⁹ In *Analects* 17.3, Confucius says, “No matter what happens, only the wise of highest class and the unwise of lowest class cannot change.” The term “shang zhi (上知)” is the archetype of superior knowledge and the term “xia yu (下愚)” is the archetype of inferior ignorance. Therefore, Confucius implies that superior knowledge does not need to be changed, and inferior ignorance cannot be changed. But most people, except for these two types, can be changed.



completed through introspection (nei xing 内省), which is a very effective method of self-examination.

In *Analects* 12.4, Confucius assumes that this method guides people in overcoming worries, fears, and regrets. This is because experiencing introspection enables human beings to engage in self-criticism. In this way, they can learn to enhance their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors by understanding what is good and what is bad. After experiencing introspection, individuals actively and consciously improve their moral character to achieve self-cultivation. This is how Confucius emphasizes the importance of postnatal education.¹⁰

From a moral perspective, to change and improve through learning could be referred to as an example of Confucian contingency. In *Analects* 9.22, he says, “Some greening plants can grow but not bloom, and some flowering plants can bloom but not fruit.” Here, Confucius uses plants, flowers, and fruits as metaphors for human beings, knowledge, and virtue to indicate that there are instances in which moral adaptability can fail. As for blooming and fruiting, we need to consider the meaning of good and bad deeds. For many reasons, unexpected situations in nature might occur that harm the growth of plants, just as in the good and bad deeds of human beings. Whether it is pursuing knowledge or virtue, each human feeling, thought, and behavior should normally conform to good tendencies. Otherwise, bad tendencies inevitably frustrate the achievement of moral adaptability. In *Analects* 9.30, Confucius stresses on occasional failures of normative behaviors, saying:

“Those who learn with us may not be able to walk along the same path, those who walk along the same path may not be able to follow the rules of etiquette, and those who follow the rules of etiquette may not be able to practice moral adaptability.”

Here, Confucius gives point to the impossibility of equal potential in achieving moral adaptability. In the long process of human life, everyone goes through different stages. Notably, there can always be unexpected difficulties on the path of learning knowledge and virtue. Some people give up halfway, while some persevere in learning and those who persevere in learning can improve their moral character. Since each individual has different ways of dealing with problems, Confucius tries to approve that all people cannot share the same eagerness for learning. Even if they can steadfastly pursue knowledge and virtue, there will necessarily be differences in handling

¹⁰ As Peimin Ni pointed out that Confucius’ primary concern is always how to live a better life and how to become a better person (Ni, 2017: 24).



problems, because being flexible obviously refers to the ability of being adaptable to changing circumstances.¹¹

However, in *Analects* 14.12, 16.10 and 19.1¹², we can analyze that Confucius' sayings are normative but not flexible. Explaining moral perfection, he directly focuses on righteousness. In Confucius' view, those who are tempted to pursue self-interest cannot achieve moral adaptability. This means that Confucius distinguishes righteousness (yi 义) from sordidness (li 利) and takes righteousness as the guiding principle of affective and cognitive motives. To understand his view correctly, we should figure out the meaning of sordidness. Whether it's power, wealth, fame, or fortune, which satisfies personal desires, can be regarded as a part of sordidness. In *The Book of Rites*, we can read the comparison between taking righteousness as a benefit (yi yi wei li 以义为利) and taking sordidness as a benefit (yi li wei li 以利为利).¹³ This type of comparison indicates that behaviors driven by self-interest are likely to disrupt the sociopolitical order. This is to say, those who can overcome the desires that are far away from knowledge and virtue are undoubtedly representatives of moral adaptability.

In *Analects* 8.9, 9.29, 11.22 and 14.28, Confucius emphasizes ultimate wisdom to achieve moral adaptability. He repeatedly says that the wise people always follow the golden mean without hesitation and they never oblique imprudence and negligence. Actually, these anecdotes are the examples of main arguments that directly deny ignorance. In *The Book of Rites*, Confucius says, "I know why some do not follow the way: wise people exceed the standard rules of the way, and ignorant people are unable to understand the standard rules of the way" (Liji, 31.4).¹⁴ At this point, it is easier to elaborate on Confucian contingency. Confucius believes that wise people are confident enough to follow the golden mean, so they cannot know whether they exceed the principles of the way or not. Ignorant people, on the other hand, are incompetent to distinguish right from wrong, so they cannot even know the principles of the way (Fang, 2006: 32). Both extravagant and deficient behaviors are inconsistent

¹¹ Yang Bojun has interpreted Confucius' use of moral adaptability in *Analects* 9.30 as "adaptable to changing circumstances" (Yang, 2009: 111).

¹² Confucius says, "Seeing profit, the one who thinks of righteousness, can be considered as a perfect human being."

¹³ "In order to ensure prosperity, a country should not prioritize sordidness over righteousness, but prioritize righteousness over sordidness" (Liji, 42.16).

¹⁴ In Confucianism, the concept Dao (道) has been explained as natural order of the cosmos in which we can sort out the meaning of "way" or "guiding way". However, in the *Doctrine of the Mean* chapter of *The Book of Rites*, this concept is attributed to the way of the golden mean. For further information, see Wang, 2006.



with ultimate wisdom, and consequently, practicing temperance¹⁵ with impartiality, equanimity and humility can be referred to as the key to moral adaptability.

In *Analects* 17.4 and 18.8, Confucius also exemplifies the disadvantages of preconceived ideas, thoughts and behaviors.¹⁶ Accordingly, both passages imply the practice of righteousness to achieve self-cultivation by being adaptive, responsive, creative, and innovative (Valmisa, 2021). Instead of following inviolable rules, people should learn about acceptable and unacceptable conduct. To Confucius, preconceived notions certainly obscure what is acceptable and unacceptable as well as what is permissible and impermissible. So, people must keep pace with spatial and temporal circumstances where exceptional cases are beyond human control. In this way, Confucian moral adaptability might be the result of moral rigidity in which we can observe normative rules rather than inviolable rules. Confucius' traditional approach is to guide people to follow the standards of etiquette by learning instructions and prescriptions according to changed conditions (Lai, 2006; Ni, 2017). When taking the statements above as a paramount expression of Confucius' normative endorsement, it can be seen that moral adaptability is external, since Confucian contingency necessitates adherence to rules and principles, especially traditional norms, which are acquired by learning knowledge and virtue. However, despite being the most influential follower and interpreter of Confucian teaching, Mencius presents a completely different view of moral adaptability by contradicting Confucius' idea of contingency.

2. Mencius' Idea of Contingency

Mencian conceptualization of contingency is directly linked to his theory of the goodness of human nature and his statement of "everything is complete in our existential essence".¹⁷ Unlike Confucius, Mencius describes innate tendencies that are

¹⁵ Temperance in the modern age has been defined as moderation, in which we can find the meaning of Confucian golden mean.

¹⁶ In 17.4, Confucius plays a joke on his student Ziyou to explain the significance of traditional norms in educating people. Here, Confucius tries to encourage his student to follow the principles, jokingly asking, "Why do you use an ox-slaughtering knife to kill a chicken?" This metaphor likely refers to critical advice to act according to appropriate rules. In 18.8, Confucius compares himself with previous/formal historical figures, saying, "I am completely different from them and I do not have any preconceived ideas about the permissible and the impermissible." This comparison is about social and political duties that conform to appropriateness (Li, 2018).

¹⁷ In *Mencius* 6a.2, he says, "The good disposition of human nature is like water's tendency to flow down. There are no men innately bad, just as there is no water that does not flow down." In 7a.4, he also states that honesty, sincerity, and reciprocity can be achieved through self-awareness.



defined as good. So, these statements remark that human feelings, thoughts, and habits are inclined to badness due to the external factors. Mencius' claim about the goodness of human nature can be considered as the awareness of knowledge and virtue. As emphasized in another statement, bad qualities are not the fault of natural endowments. Mencius says:

"I am saying that human nature is good because our inherently feelings are good. As for some people who do bad deeds, cannot blame their innate nature. Everyone on earth inherently has the sense of compassion, the sense of shame, the sense of deference, and the sense of right and wrong. The sense of compassion is the seed of benevolence, the sense of shame is the seed of righteousness, the sense of deference is the seed of etiquette, the sense of right and wrong is the seed of wisdom. Benevolence, righteousness, etiquette, and wisdom are not infused into us from outside. We are all born with these virtues. But the problem is that we do not know how to cultivate them" (*Mencius*, 6a.6).

Here, Mencius explains the necessity of self-awareness in detail. Since human nature is inherently good, bad deeds are the certain results of environmental influences. His theory is based on four feelings¹⁸ through which we can cultivate our innate virtues. In this way, Mencius traces the premise of natural endowments as the goodness of inner feelings. In the same passage, he also says, "If you pursue, you will find it; if you ignore, you will lose it." To Mencius, the main reason why people are different from each other is that they cannot become aware of their essential goodness. He states that individuals who devote themselves can know their own nature, those who adhere to benevolence can cultivate their heart-mind and those who achieve wisdom can maintain their original self.¹⁹ Additionally, unlike Confucius, Mencius addresses social equality by saying, "The sage and I are of the same kind."²⁰ He believes that human beings share common pursuits as well as similar abilities. But the differences between people originate from ignorance that causes material desires to prevail.

¹⁸ Four sprouts (si duan 四端) are the core concepts of human feelings. After Confucius, Mencius further focused on explaining traditional values in an analogical and metaphorical way in order to guide people who are aware of innate knowledge and virtue.

¹⁹ *Mencius*, 1a.7; 4b.28; 7a.1.

²⁰ *Mencius*, 6a.7. This anecdote indicates that Mencius has been a proponent of justice. He cites a social system in which individuals are not classified according to hierarchical status. This is why Mencius claims that all humans are capable of becoming a sage (Hu and Pu, 2024).



In *Mencius* 7b.35, we can read a recommendation for reducing inessential needs. Since his theory prioritizes the needs of spiritual life, it is clear that material desires are excluded in the process of self-cultivation. In this statement, Mencius explains the only way to achieve sageliness and virtuousness is to abdicate sensual pleasures. In other words, material desires and sensual pleasures pose obstacles to cultivating one's moral character. To Mencius, people who are aware of innate knowledge and virtue can remain the heart-mind of a newborn babe.²¹ This argument is related to the goodness of our existential essence, which can also be referred to as original innocence. Mencius believes that each human being has a heart-mind that cannot bear to see others' suffering, exemplifying an intuitive sense:

“Suppose that someone suddenly comes across a little child who is about to fall into a well. Anyone who experiences this moment will indisputably be afraid and worried owing to the sense of compassion. Having such a feeling is neither to please the parents of the child nor to win the praise of their neighbors and friends, nor to dislike acquiring a bad reputation/disrepute for leaving the child in the lurch” (*Mencius*, 2a.6).

Here, Mencius explains a subtle way of intuitive learning. The term *bu ren* (不忍), which means being unable to bear, provides a clue to the ability for empathy. Given that human beings are born with the sense of compassion, and benevolence is the expression of the sense of compassion, Mencius stresses that everyone has a natural potential to become intuitively aware of selfless behaviors. His arguments on cognitive and affective motives should be understood as the internal intentions. Furthermore, his theory expounds that different behaviors are not the results of natural tendencies but the results of environmental influences. In *Mencius* 6a.8, we can read that environmental influences cause people to move away from essential goodness. He says, “What originally exists in our essential self if we are deprived of benevolence and righteousness? The reason why people lose their conscience is like hewing down the trees on the mountains.”²² This statement indicates that external factors might harm the essential goodness of human nature, just as the green areas turn into barrens.

²¹ *Mencius*, 4b.12. In Mencian philosophy, the term heart-mind (*xin* 心) is attributed to the integration of feelings and thoughts, and is characterized by the concept of “self”. Additionally, the heart-mind of a newborn babe (*chizi zhi xin* 赤子之心), also known as a child-like heart, represents the key point of Mencian essential goodness that should be maintained for life.

²² In this passage, Mencius uses an analogy concerning Mount Niu. Firstly, he illustrates this mountain with a great view full of lush green trees. Then, he blames people who hewed down the trees and destroyed the spontaneous balance of the nature with the aim of expanding the lands.



Actually, Mencius tries to conclude that our existential essence needs to be nourished to grow innate knowledge and virtue. Otherwise, essential goodness will perish because of acquired habits and evil-minded deeds. His approach conveys the same message as his anecdote, “if you pursue, you will find it; if you ignore, you will lose it,” which emphasizes the importance of self-cultivation.

In another statement, Mencius assumes that moral adaptability cannot be dissociated from external contingency. He exemplifies how to be flexible regarding the norms of etiquette. In *The Book of Rites*, we can read an ancient rule that directly prohibits physical contact between men and women.²³ However, in *Mencius* 4a.17, it is seen that a man can touch a woman to rescue her from drowning in the water:

“If a man who does not dare to save his sister-in-law from drowning in the water, is indifferent from jackals and wolves. It is a common etiquette for men and woman not to touch each other when giving or receiving things. Nevertheless, bestowing a hand on a woman who is about to drowning and rescuing her from danger, is an exceptional case.”

Here, Mencius suggests being flexible despite the rules of etiquette. This means that even traditional principles can be tolerated in special circumstances. More specifically, Mencius condemns the people who narrow-mindedly obey to the norms, ignoring the sense of compassion. In *Mencius* 6b.1, he also compares the necessity and unnessary between basic needs and norms, saying, “Comparing the important aspects of appetite with the unimportant aspects of etiquette, isn’t eating more important?” This statement implies that immoderate needs and norms are not incompatible with adaptability and flexibility. To Mencius, adhering to rules and principles is important, but considering balance and coherence is more important. In *Mencius* 4b.11, he also states that a virtuous person doesn’t foresee speaking sincerely and behaving resolutely, but always follows the righteousness. This statement emphasizes not only spontaneous feelings and thoughts, but also righteous words and deeds. For Mencius, achieving moral perfection requires the integrity of benevolent and righteous behaviors, since benevolence is the human self and righteousness is the human way (*Mencius*, 6a.11). His assumption is therefore responsive to the following argument: Words and deeds should be subject to righteousness, and without benevolence social norms, including etiquette, cannot be practiced.

In this regard, compared with Confucian contingency, Mencian contingency is more akin to flexible wisdom. While both ethical and political ideas emphasize the

²³ “Men and women should not touch each other (nan nü shou shou bu qin 男女授受不亲)” was a core principle in ancient China. This principle referred to the idea that unmarried men and women should maintain a certain distance between each other. For further information, see Liji, 30.38.



golden mean, they have completely different perspectives. When there is a conflict between laws and morals, Confucius advocates adhering to strict rules and principles. On the other hand, Mencius advocates improving moral standards rather than adhering to strict rules and principles.²⁴ This kind of disagreement has apparently influenced their statements on adaptability and flexibility. As Mencius says, “being urgent about the golden mean without being adaptable to changing circumstances can lead to intemperance”²⁵; contingency requires a certain flexibility for particular conditions. Identifying contingency as a way of being adaptable and flexible, we can remark that cultivating moral character is also explained in two different perspectives due to the human nature theories in Confucian and Mencian teachings. Since Confucian teaching highlights acquired knowledge and virtue, cultivating moral character is external. Owing to the fact that Mencian teaching highlights innate knowledge and virtue, cultivating moral character is internal. Considering learnt and inherent characteristics prioritized by Confucius and Mencius, it seems possible to sort out that Mencian contingency on moral adaptability cannot fail.

Conclusion

In this paper, we tried to examine the differences between Confucian and Mencian contingency in terms of the principles of their doctrines by highlighting the golden mean in particular. For this purpose, we discussed three main arguments to analyze their ideas for achieving moral adaptability. Although the ultimate goal of a human being is to complete and elevate moral perfection in their teachings, enhancing self-cultivation clearly differs in self-reflective and self-restrictive methods explained through internal and external motives. The first argument based on the way of learning, ascribing moral responsibility to individuals, has been referred to as learnt and inherent characteristics. Confucius’ theory of similar nature plays a critical role in explicating acquired knowledge and virtue. Accordingly, human beings learn goodness and avoid badness through practical experience. In contrast, Mencius’ theory of good nature alludes to a key point in realizing innate knowledge and virtue, allowing human

²⁴ Their disagreement also refers to the concept of self-control. For Confucius, human beings cannot control each exceptional case in this life, as they have to be obedient to predestinated laws and predetermined norms. Specifically, for Mencius, human beings can control exceptional cases because they innately have the sense of right and wrong. Unlike Confucius, Mencius claims that human beings are naturally capable of being adaptable to changing circumstances. For discussions on Confucian and Mencian flexibility within human control, see Bloom, 2003; Ivanhoe, 1991; and Perkins, 2006.

²⁵ *Mencius*, 7a.26. In this statement, he underlines the importance of consistency and stability in temperance. To Mencius, holding on to any idea or insisting on any issue is contrary to the principle of the golden mean.



beings to improve goodness and restrain badness through moral awareness. Thusly, we figured out that continuing the golden mean is essentially based on two foundations. In other words, Confucian normative approach to cultivating moral character is external, while Mencian intuitive approach to cultivating moral character is internal.

Another argument concerning moral adaptability indicates a conflict over whether human beings have equal or unequal potential. In Confucian ethics, we can note that appropriateness to laws and norms is the main principle in regulating the proper way of enhancing self-cultivation. Confucius believes in the impossibility of common ability because of class-based inequality. In Mencian ethics, we can note that consciousness of existential essence is the main principle in pursuing the proper way of enhancing self-cultivation. Mencius believes in the possibility of common ability by means of social equality. In this respect, their doctrines on how moral adaptability is achieved are also evaluated from two different perspectives. Following this, the last argument regarding the primary meanings of benevolence and righteousness implies a certain opposition about being flexible or not. Confucius persists in adhering to the norms of etiquette and focusing on righteous behaviors rather than feeling compassion for fulfilling benevolence. However, Mencius assumes that feeling compassion is the beginning of each moral value, such as benevolence and righteousness. The fact remains that their disagreement arising from the conceptualization of contingency allows us to see that Confucian rigidity causes some occasional failures, but Mencian flexibility eliminates all occasional failures.

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