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Between Communitarianism and Confucianism: Charles Taylor and the Confucian Concept of Self in Comparative Perspective

Med komunitarizmom in konfucianizmom: Charles Taylor in konfucijanski koncept jaza v primerjalni perspektivi

Abstract: In a world increasingly marked by ideological and theological divisions, this paper aims to foster intercultural and interfaith dialogue by examining the resonances and dissonances between Charles Taylor's communitarianism and Confucian philosophy. Focusing particularly on their theological and spiritual dimensions, the paper explores how both traditions conceptualize selfhood in terms of authenticity, community, and transcendence. Employing a multi-disciplinary approach, the study incorporates Warren G. Frisina's critique of Taylor, shedding light on the interconnections among value, identity, and theological beliefs. Ultimately, this paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of selfhood across different cultural and theological contexts and offers constructive insights for bridging the existing epistemological and ethical divides that separate Eastern and Western religious and philosophical thought.

Keywords: Communitarianism, Confucianism, Charles Taylor, Self, Authenticity

Povzetek: V svetu, ki ga vse bolj zaznamujejo ideološke in teološke delitve, je namen tega prispevka spodbuditi medkulturni in medverski dialog z obravnavo resonanc in disonanc med komunitarizmom Charlesa Taylorja in konfucijansko filozofijo. Članek se osredotoča zlasti na njune teološke in duhovne razsežnosti ter raziskuje, kako obe tradiciji pojmujeta samopodobo v smislu avtentičnosti, skupnosti in transcendence. Z uporabo multidisciplinarnega pristopa študija vključuje kritiko Taylorja pri Warrenu G. Frisinu in osvetljuje medsebojne povezave med vrednotami, identiteto in teološkimi prepričanji. Končno obravnava prispeva k bolj diferenciranemu razumevanju samopodobe v različnih kulturnih in teoloških kontekstih ter ponuja konstruktivna spoznanja za premostitev obstoječih epistemoloških in etičnih razlik, ki ločujejo vzhodno in zahodno versko ter filozofsko misel.

Ključne besede: komunitarizem, konfucianizem, Charles Taylor, jaz, avtentičnost.

1. Introduction

The confluence of philosophy and theology serves as a fertile ground for exploring complex entanglements of selfhood, community, and ethical values—a subject matter that this paper treats with nuanced analysis. We consider the philosophical and theological dimensions of Charles Taylor's Communitarianism and Confucianism, not as disparate intellectual artifacts, but as complementary paradigms that inform our understanding of human identity and societal norms. This investigation is timely and salient, given the burgeoning polarization along ideological and theological lines in contemporary society. Our overarching hypothesis posits that Charles Taylor's Communitarian philosophy and the Confucian conception of selfhood not only intersect at numerous junctures but also offer reciprocal illuminations that counter the hegemony of individualistic frameworks that define the individual as an isolated, autonomous agent.

In pursuit of this hypothesis, the paper employs a multi-disciplinary comparative approach to dissect key principles within each tradition, including their distinctive perspectives on the nature of self, the mechanics of community formation, and the construction of ethical frameworks. This exercise will allow us to identify both shared and divergent motifs between these two philosophical systems, culminating in a richer, multidimensional understanding of their mutual preoccupation with the role of community and shared values in individual and societal development. Our study thus situates itself at the confluence of philosophy, theology, and comparative studies, aiming to unpack complex dialogues around selfhood, moral reasoning, and ethical paradigms. It endeavors to foster a more integrative, nuanced scholarship that bridges Eastern and Western perspectives, serving not merely as an academic exercise but as an intellectual catalyst for broader conversations around metaphysical and ethical issues.

2. Understanding Communitarianism

2.1 Definition and Historical Background of Communitarianism

Communitarianism is a philosophical framework that underscores the integral relationship between individuals and their communities. It posits that much of an individual's identity and character are shaped by their interactions within their community, with less emphasis placed on individualistic development (Etzioni 2014). The term "communitarian" was originally coined in 1841 by John Goodwyn Barmby, a key figure in the British Chartist movement. Barmby used the term to describe utopian socialists and other visionaries who were exploring community-based living arrangements. However, it wasn't until the 1980s that the term communitarianism came into more widespread use, particularly in academic and political discourse. This renewed interest was primarily attributed to the work of a handful of influential political philosophers, such as Charles Taylor and Michael

Sandel, among others (Bell 2023). Their contributions lent the term greater legitimacy and nuance, connecting it to contemporary debates on the balance between individual rights and communal responsibilities.

2.2 Examination of Charles Taylor's Contributions to Communitarianism

Charles Taylor, a prominent Canadian philosopher, has made substantial contributions across multiple disciplines, including political philosophy, the philosophy of social science, intellectual history, and the history of philosophy. Taylor's exploration of the modern identity reveals a complex interplay of various strands that have shaped our conception of selfhood. These include the value of freedom, the importance of authenticity and individuality, and the recognition of the suffering of others. Taylor's philosophy is often described as bridging the gap between analytic and Continental styles of philosophy, and his work has been influential in both Western and non-Western contexts (Abbey 2011).

Taylor contends that social institutions play a pivotal role in shaping individual meaning and identity, thereby questioning the liberal focus on individual rights and autonomy. Taylor is particularly interested in exploring how language plays a constitutive role in forming our identity and agency. He delves into the intersubjective aspects of human action, examining how our shared linguistic and cultural practices shape individual experiences. Moreover, Taylor's work extends to sociological considerations, tackling issues such as the character of nationalism and the social foundation of certain human values and goods (Calhoun 1998).

One of the core criticisms Taylor levels against liberal philosophy is its undue emphasis on individual rights and personal autonomy. He argues that such a focus can potentially foster a culture of selfishness or egocentrism (Lehman 2015). In his seminal work The Ethics of Authenticity, Taylor (1991) explores the complexities and paradoxes associated with the quest for authentic self-fulfilment. He contends that this pursuit becomes illogical and counterproductive when it is anchored in a form of individualism that disregards communal bonds and social responsibilities. Furthermore, Taylor critiques the overreliance on instrumental reason and the disengagement from public life as corrosive to the very notion of authenticity one seeks (Calhoun 1998). Taylor's thought serves as a rigorous critique of liberal individualism, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of the human self that recognizes the interplay between individual and community. His work offers an alternative philosophical framework that insists on the social dimensions of human identity and the ethical considerations that arise from our embeddedness in community life.

2.3 Analysis of Taylor's Concept of Authenticity and Self-Fulfilment in the Context of Communitarianism

In The Ethics of Authenticity, Taylor (1991, 25–30) argues that the modern search for authentic self-fulfilment is deeply connected to the development of individual mea-

ning and identity within a community. He contends that the pursuit of authenticity can become incoherent when it is based on atomistic individualism, which prioritizes personal autonomy and individual rights over the common good and community values (Calhoun 1998). Taylor (1991, 55–70) believes that the modern emphasis on individualism and personal autonomy has led to a crisis in our understanding of the self and our relationships with others. He suggests that the resources for confronting this crisis can be found in our philosophical and cultural traditions, which recognize the importance of community in shaping individual identity and fostering personal fulfilment (Calhoun 1998). We can thus see that Charles Taylor's contributions to communitarianism focus on critiquing the liberal emphasis on individual rights and personal autonomy, while highlighting the importance of community in shaping individual identity and promoting authentic self-fulfilment. His work provides valuable insights into the relationship between the individual and the community, as well as the role of social institutions in fostering personal growth and well-being. We can also appreciate Taylor's exploration of the modern understanding of selfhood, its historical sources, and its deep intertwining with our understanding of the good. We support Taylor's argument that the modern notion of the self provides a framework that more than compensates for the abandonment of substantive notions of rationality (Calhoun 1991), and that the modern turn inward is not disastrous but is in fact the result of our long efforts to define and reach the good.

3.   Understanding Confucianism

3.1   Definition and Historical Background of Confucianism

Confucianism, a term that has no counterpart in Chinese, is a worldview, a social ethic, a political ideology, a scholarly tradition, and a way of life. It was propagated by Confucius in the 6th–5th century BCE and has been followed by the Chinese people for more than two millennia. Its influence has also extended to other countries, particularly Korea, Japan, and Vietnam (Yao 2000). Confucius envisioned his role as a conduit, deliberately aiming to invigorate traditional wisdom as a pathway to forge new understandings. By endorsing a life guided by ritual practices, he sought to imbue ancient ideas with renewed significance (Csikszentmihalyi 2020; Confucius 2023). His exploration of historical antecedents functioned as a quest for foundational principles, anchored in what he identified as humanity's innate yearning for both a sense of community and meaningful discourse (Tu 1998). In a similar vein, Mencius, frequently dubbed the "Second Sage" within Confucianism, emerged as a philosopher in the 4th century BCE who is most renowned for his assertion that "human nature is intrinsically virtuous" (Mencius [n.d.]a). Mencius perceived his mission as the preservation and advocacy of the Confucian intellectual legacy (Van Norden 2019). In the context of Vietnam, Confucianism has been effectively integrated into the social fabric. The Vietnamese have imparted their unique interpretations to Confucian principles, rendering their cultural traditions

notably divergent from those found in Chinese, Korean, or Japanese versions of Confucianism (Lozano 2021, 170–171).

3.2 Examination of the Confucian Concept of Self

From the perspective of Confucian philosophy, the objective of self-cultivation is to morally refine individuals so they can attain alignment with the Way (*dao*). The educational journey in this context accentuates both the autonomy of the individual and their interconnectedness with others. "Throughout the learning process, both the independence and inter-dependence of the self are emphasized." (Tan 2017, 250) In Confucian thought, self-cultivation is a balancing act involving the internal and external aspects of oneself, as well as the relationship between oneself and the surrounding community (Nguyen 1994, 220). The term "self-cultivation" is a shortened form of "xiū-xīn yǎng-xìng", which can be translated as "rectifying one's mind and nurturing one's character with a particular art or philosophy" (Hwang – Chang 2009, 1011). Furthermore, Confucius conceptualized an individual's life as an extension of their parents' lives. As a result, adherents of Confucianism are committed to educating their children in a manner that ensures the younger generation learns the importance of self-cultivation and develops an adequate level of self-discipline. This approach aligns with broader East Asian philosophical traditions like Taoism and Buddhism, which also emphasize personal cultivation and ethical living.

The ultimate goal is to achieve a "heavenly human harmony". The cosmos is represented through the dual elements of Heaven and Earth, and human beings serve as the embodiment of all living creatures. This notion of mutual interdependence suggests that mentions of Heaven, Earth, and humanity collectively encapsulate a holistic understanding of the Universe and all its constituents (Nguyen 1992, 241). All forms of existence emanate from Tai Chi (The Absolute 太極), possessing inherent laws that govern both large-scale phenomena (Heaven and Earth) and smaller-scale aspects (human nature). This interconnectedness is further explicated in the text: "The qualities manifested by Qian correspond to the masculine; those manifested by Kun align with the feminine. / ... / Humans, as the offspring of Heaven and Earth, stand on par with them. / ... / Qian 乾 (signifying Heaven) is responsible for initiating the vast undertakings; Kun 坤 (Earth) brings them to fruition" (The Book of Change [n.d.]).

In his efforts to differentiate human beings from animals, Mencius offered a nuanced understanding of the intrinsic worth of life. He observed a subtle yet consequential divergence between humans and lower animals, stating: "That whereby man differs from the lower animals is but small. The mass of people cast it away, while superior men preserve it." (Mencius [n.d.] a) Contrary to a viewpoint that might suggest that human distinctiveness is rooted in instinctual drives or rudimentary desires, Mencius postulates that the distinguishing factor lies in moral cognizance and the commitment to ethical obligations. Mencius suggests that while the distinction may appear negligible on the surface, it holds a profound weight that cannot be ignored. This minute difference, in his view, holds the key to the moral and ethical universe that sets human beings apart from other species. The "mass of people", or the average individual, may neglect or even discard this dis-

tinguishing characteristic, thereby leading a life not fully realizing their human potential. On the other hand, "superior men", or individuals who are morally enlightened, carefully safeguard this unique trait, acknowledging it as the bedrock of human dignity and ethical behavior. In this regard, Mencius states: "If you fully explore your mind, you will know your nature. If you know your nature, you know Heaven." (Mencius [n.d.] b)

In this way, Mencius introduces a layered understanding of humanity. His argument posits that it is not our basic urges or survival instincts that set us apart, but rather our capacity for moral reasoning and ethical commitment. This implies a sense of duty or responsibility to not just preserve but also to cultivate this special quality that differentiates humans from animals. Thus, Mencius places a high premium on ethical cultivation as a path towards realizing the fullest extent of what it means to be human. In fact, the authentic essence of human nature, according to Mencius, is encapsulated in moral and ethical principles like compassion, justice, social decorum, and sagacity. Mencius contended that a person lacking in these moral qualities falls short of manifesting the genuine core of what it means to be human, regardless of their biological human status (Van Norden 2019).

Mencius thus posits that being human is not merely a matter of species classification but rather entails a deeper, moral dimension. In his view, to be authentically human is to be an ethical being, someone who embodies virtues such as humanity, which can be understood as empathetic concern for others; righteousness, or the commitment to just action; propriety, which entails understanding and adhering to social and cultural norms; and wisdom, the application of ethical principles in complex, often ambiguous situations (Yao 1996). These are not just addenda to human nature; they are its very essence, distinguishing it from mere biological existence. According to Mencius, an individual who lacks these moral attributes essentially forfeits the defining qualities that make them fully human. Such a person may possess human form, but they would be bereft of the moral substance that substantiates the very notion of human uniqueness, as elucidated in the earlier discussion about the difference between humans and animals. Consequently, in Mencius's philosophical framework, ethical integrity is not just an aspirational quality but a foundational aspect of human identity. Thus, for Mencius, the path to truly realizing one's human potential is inseparable from the journey toward moral and ethical enlightenment.

Therefore, we concur with Chen Xunwu's (2014) central argument, which posits that Confucian ethics should not be understood merely through the lenses of role-based, rule-based, or virtue ethics, but rather as an ethics centered on the concept of the self—a self-based ethics. At its core, Confucian ethics aims to cultivate a self that embodies inner wisdom akin to sagehood and external leadership qualities akin to kinghood (内圣外王). It focuses on the realization of a self that is fully aware of its unique character, substance, and personality. Unlike ethical systems that presume an already-existing self that merely needs to be molded into a virtuous, rule-following, or duty-bound entity, Confucian ethics operates on the premise that the self is not a given but must be actively constructed, nur-

tured, and actualized within the framework of ethical living, even though the raw potential for such self-formation is inherent.

The significance of this way of arguing for understanding the Confucian notion of the self is profound. It underscores that in Confucianism, the self is not a static or pre-existing entity but rather a dynamic construct that requires ongoing ethical development. This viewpoint shifts the ethical emphasis from simply adhering to established norms or virtues to the more nuanced task of continuously creating and realizing one's self within an ethical context. It suggests that Confucian ethics is not just a prescriptive system telling us what to do, but an aspirational framework guiding us on how to be. This ethos of self-cultivation and actualization offers a more comprehensive and transformative understanding of what it means to lead an ethical life, emphasizing both inner wisdom and external responsibility (Hwang 2017). Therefore, understanding Confucian ethics as an ethics of the self provides a nuanced and holistic framework for understanding human potentiality, ethical development, and the intricate relationship between individual identity and moral life.

3.3   Analysis of the Confucian Concept of Li and Its Relevance to the Self

The concept of Li in Confucian thought is multifaceted and deeply nuanced, commonly translated as "ritual", "proper conduct", or "propriety". In its archaic form, Li was originally associated with specific court rituals designed to maintain both social stability and cosmic equilibrium. However, Confucian scholars expanded and refined this notion to encompass formalized social roles and institutional structures that they believed the ancients had devised based on cosmic paradigms, aiming to establish a harmonious social fabric. As societal norms evolved, the meaning of Li underwent further transformation. It transcended its initial focus on specific rites and rituals to encapsulate conventional behavioural norms. This gave rise to a renewed understanding of Li as an internalized ethical framework that delineates what is considered appropriate conduct within society (Tu 1972, 188–189). Far from being a set of mere formalities or social niceties, Li evolved into a pivotal component of Confucianism's human-centric religious philosophy.

Significantly, despite its anthropocentric focus, Li has never fully divorced itself from its cosmic origins. It continues to serve as a metaphysical bridge between the human experience and the natural world, harmonizing the two through a sort of enchantment that elevates day-to-day life into a higher plane of meaning. In this sense, Li functions as both an ethical code and a cosmic principle, guiding individuals in their interactions not just with fellow humans, but also with the universe at large. Therefore, Confucianism, by centering on the concept of Li, offers a holistic approach to understanding the complexities of the self, its interplay with societal structures, and its connection to the greater cosmic order (200). This makes Confucianism a comprehensive philosophical and ethical system that has significantly shaped the cultures and societies in which it has been adopted. It presents a unique framework for personal development and ethical behaviour, placing a premium on self-cultivation as the pathway to achieve a balanced life, harmonious relationships, and meaningful engagement with both society and the cosmos.

4. Charles Taylor and Confucianism: A Comparative Perspective

4.1 Comparison of Taylor's Communitarianism and the Confucian Concept of Self

Both Charles Taylor's communitarianism and Confucianism converge on the idea that individual identity is deeply embedded in a socio-cultural matrix. Confucian philosophy posits the individual as an intersection within a complex web of relationships, making human beings inherently relational entities (Phan 2011). The Confucian model of personhood is predicated on development, virtues, and the preeminent influence of family dynamics. It is relational, developmental, and virtue-based (Wong 2012). Taylor's communitarianism resonates with this understanding. He, too, considers human beings as part of an expansive cosmos and places his work in dialogue with both the Western intellectual tradition and non-Western philosophical perspectives, thereby further affirming the interrelated nature of human existence.

Similarities can be found in the way both systems of thought criticize the typical Western modern conception of the self. When it comes to understanding the essence of the Confucian critique, Hwang & Chang offer one of the most convincing summaries:

> "In contrast to the Western-style culture of self-contained individualism in which human rights and free choice are emphasized with the belief that there should be a clear-cut boundary between one's self and others (Sampson, 1988), Confucians advocate a kind of self-ensembled individualism in which a person is seen as embedded in a particular social network and the boundary of the self may be extended to include significant others (Hwang, 2001). That is, instead of encouraging a child to have an independent self that is the autonomous agent of action, Confucian cultures tend to foster the individual's interdependent self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) or relational self." (Hwang and Chang 2009, 1012)

The critique put forth by Confucianism against Western-style individualism is profoundly similar to Taylor's reservations about liberal theories of the self. While Western liberal thought often prizes individual autonomy and clearly demarcated boundaries between individuals, Confucianism, like Taylor's communitarianism, champions a relational concept of self, situated within specific social networks and larger moral frameworks. Confucian cultures emphasize an "interdependent self", a notion that resonates deeply with Taylor's idea that our individual identities are indissolubly connected to our social contexts (Phan 2011, 170–172).

To delve further into this, let's consider Craig Calhoun's (1991) reflections on Charles Taylor's work, especially the text Sources of the Self. Calhoun's appreciation for Taylor pivots on the intertwined nature of morality, identity, and historical understanding. He (1991, 251) praises Taylor's investigation into the complexities

of modern selfhood and commends Taylor's assertion that modern identities are not existential losses but are, in fact, enriched frameworks built on sustained human efforts to comprehend and pursue the good. Calhoun (1991, 258) concurs with Taylor's view that the self is not an isolated entity but is deeply intertwined with the notion of the "Good". This aligns well with Confucian ethics, where the cultivation of virtues is closely related to the pursuit of the Way (*dao*) and social harmony. Furthermore, Calhoun's acknowledgment of Taylor's argument—that the self's understanding is intimately linked with one's family, religion, profession, and nation—finds an echo in Confucianism, which also emphasizes these very social contexts in the shaping of the self.

We can thus clearly see that the affinities between Taylor's communitarianism and Confucian thought underscore the deep-seated relationality that both ascribe to the human self. Both frameworks offer a compelling alternative to the often myopic individualism of much of Western philosophy, illuminating the intricate social tapestries that give shape to human identity. This comparative examination not only enriches our understanding of each perspective but also opens up new avenues for cross-cultural philosophical dialogue.

4.2 Analysis of the Similarities and Differences between Taylor's and Confucian Views on Self-Fulfilment and Self-Cultivation

Both Charles Taylor and Confucian thought accord substantial importance to the notions of self-development and self-actualization. Within the Confucian framework, the act of self-cultivation involves the meticulous modulation of one's moral character, enacted through the principles of benevolence (*ren*), ritual correctness (*li*), moral disposition (*yi*), wisdom (*zhi*), reliability (*xin*), and familial reverence (*xiao*) (Chu & Vu 2022). This ethical shaping is construed as a pathway to engender societal equilibrium and a life imbued with moral excellence. Taylor, on the other hand, accentuates the quest for personal authenticity, advocating for the establishment of a moral schema that harmonizes with the distinctiveness of one's own identity. Taylor's theoretical edifice is predicated on the advancement of human well-being, consistently situated within a broader, pre-existing cosmic milieu (Olafson 1994; Calhoun 1998). Despite both paradigms underscoring the themes of self-development and personal realization, they diverge in their focal points. Confucianism predominantly underscores the societal and relational dimensions of self-cultivation, whereas Taylor allocates more attention to the personal endeavor for authenticity, situated within a grander cosmic context.

It's crucial to recognize that the religious inclinations of Charles Taylor, chiefly shaped by Christian tenets, and the cosmological underpinnings of Confucianism, which accentuate a symbiosis between human and cosmic elements, offer disparate viewpoints on the concept of transcendence. Taylor's outlook, rooted in Christian doctrine, posits a form of external transcendence, while Confucian thought champions a form of inward transcendence. These divergent approaches can be examined through their particular construals of the human engagement with divinity and the universe at large. Taylor provides a nuanced narrative on the role

of religion, especially Christianity, in contemporary society. He characterizes Christianity as a faith that invigorates human life in a dual manner: it aspires to elevate human goals while simultaneously consecrating mundane daily existence. This dichotomy generates a tension between the call for radical metamorphosis and the mundane necessities of day-to-day life. For Taylor, Christianity enjoins individuals towards both self-actualization and self-transcendence. This dialectic is a pivotal component in Taylor's conceptualization of Christianity, perceived as a faith that not only exhorts us to transcend our current states but also provides solace in the face of immediate challenges (Rose 2014).

Conversely, contemporary Confucian scholars such as Tu Weiming articulate that Confucianism strives for a harmonious symbiosis between humanity and the celestial realm. This is not a binary relationship of a Creator distinct from the created, but rather one of reciprocal loyalty. Confucian philosophy endorses the notion of "self-perfectibility via individual exertion", premised on the belief that each person possesses ample innate potential for ultimate self-realization. Notably, this transformative process is not contingent on a supernatural intermediary but is intrinsically human-centered. This viewpoint stems from a Chinese cosmological schema that eschews the notion of a Creator distinct from the cosmos. From the Confucian vantage point, the notion that humans could be fundamentally estranged from Heaven is inconceivable (Andrew [n.d.]). Unlike Christianity, which posits the doctrine of original sin and divine grace, Confucianism conceives of the cosmos as a perpetually unfolding tapestry of interlinked creativity that is indifferent to specific forms of existence and eschews human-centric interpretations. The relationship between Heaven and humanity in Confucianism is not simply a creator-created dichotomy but one of mutual allegiance. This relationship constitutes an "expansive humanism" underscored by an "anthropocosmic perspective". Confucian self-cultivation unfurls as a gradual integration of all communal layers in the journey toward self-realization, extending from familial circles to universal and cosmic domains (Tu 1998; Andrew 2013; 2022). When juxtaposed, it becomes evident that while both Christian and Confucian philosophies advocate some form of transcendence, they diverge in their interpretations of the mechanics of achieving this transcendent state. While Christianity invokes an external form of transcendence mediated by a divine figure and directed toward loftier objectives, Confucianism promotes an internal form of transcendence anchored in individual capacity and oriented toward cosmic unity (Frisina 2000). These disparate perspectives could illuminate important dimensions in the cross-disciplinary dialogue encompassing science, philosophy, and religion.

4.3 Is there a Potential Influence of Confucian Thought on Taylor's Philosophy, or Vice Versa?

Although there's no explicit proof to suggest that Confucian philosophy has directly shaped Taylor's intellectual contributions, or the converse, the conceptual intersections and mutual thematic concerns are readily apparent. Both intellectual frameworks prioritize the sociocultural construction of the self and underscore the pivotal role of self-development and personal actualization. Taylor's ideolo-

gical focus on individualistic authenticity and the crafting of an ethical schema congruent with one's singular identity finds resonance with Confucian ideals surrounding virtue development and self-betterment. Moreover, both schools of thought concurrently highlight the formative impact of social interconnections in sculpting individual identity (Wong 2020; Wong 2012). Conversely, Confucianism, which predominantly centers on the interpersonal and collective dimensions of self-enhancement, might potentially find its scope broadened by Taylor's concentration on individual pursuit of authenticity and fulfilment in the context of a larger cosmic narrative, or what could be termed "the quest for ultimate significance".

Charles Taylor's critical engagement with liberal theorists—particularly their tendency to marginalize religious discourse in public deliberations—underscores the imperative of accommodating both sacred and secular viewpoints in a genuinely unbiased milieu. Taylor propounds the notion of humans as beings who interpret their own existence, contending that this self-interpretation is often deeply enmeshed within our religious or traditional cultural frameworks. He calls for a meaningful interchange between religious and non-religious theoretical perspectives, with the goal of achieving a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer 2013; Taylor 1994; Chambers 2010). As it relates to Confucian thought, Taylor's hermeneutical approach can provide insights into the gravity accorded to tradition within Confucianism. Lately, hermeneutics—an analytical method with roots in Western philosophical traditions—has garnered interest within Confucian circles, particularly its emphasis on a relational and emotive interpretive paradigm that is consonant with its longstanding focus on experiential cognition. This Confucian approach to the elucidation of tradition finds compatibility with Taylor's accentuation of the dialogue between religious and secular frameworks. Taylor's notion of humans as self-interpretative creatures has resonated across varied cultural spectra, including those influenced by Confucian thought, particularly in Southeast Asia. Consequently, there is merit in examining how Taylor's hermeneutical principles can be fruitfully applied within a Confucian context, emphasizing both the pivotal role of tradition and the centrality of relational and emotive interpretive schemes. While it remains speculative to assert any overt mutual influences between these two philosophical and arguably, theological vistas, it is apparent that shared thematic elements and conceptual parallels create possibilities for collaborative intellectual exploration and enrichment.

Now on a more critical but also creative note. In our further reflection, we would like to turn to Warren G. Frisina's (2000) scrutiny of Charles Taylor's Sources of the Self. We believe that it provides a compelling gateway to synergistic dialogues between Taylorian and Confucian thought, notably in their shared aspiration to redefine the ontology of the self within a cosmos of objective values. Frisina (2000, 118) accentuates that while Taylor critiques the modern interiorized self, characterized by its severance from an objective reality of value, his neglect of American pragmatic and process traditions constitutes an oversight. Interestingly, Confucian metaphysics, like pragmatic and process philosophies, rebuff the subjectivization of value and advocate for a direct, embodied relationship between the self and the world—thereby

filling a gap in Taylor's scholarship (Frisina 2000, 120). Moreover, Taylor's introduction of hypergoods as background values that contour our moral and aesthetic judgments appears to intersect conceptually with Confucian notions of virtue and moral sensibilities. Both Taylor and Confucian philosophers like Wang Yang Ming recognize the limitations of the Western epistemological paradigm, indicating a mutual yearning for metaphysical frameworks that surpass dualistic epistemologies (Frisina 2000, 122). While Taylor urges a reconfiguration of selfhood that acknowledges objective realities of value and moral nuance, he does not furnish exhaustive metaphysical substantiation for this objective value—an endeavor where Confucian, pragmatic, and process ontologies can be revelatory. In light of this, we concur with Frisina (2020, 124) that a concerted inquiry into the convergences between Taylor's philosophical construct and Confucian thought offers not merely an academic exercise but a fertile ground for multidimensional understandings of selfhood, thereby amplifying the scope for mutual intellectual enrichment and discourse.

5. Conclusion

In undertaking this comparative exploration of Charles Taylor's Communitarian philosophy and Confucian thought, we have fulfilled our hypothesis that juxtaposing these two philosophical paradigms can yield novel perspectives on the nature and formation of individual identity in relation to community and shared values. Our rigorous inquiry began with an in-depth examination of Charles Taylor's notions, specifically focusing on his rejection of the isolated, atomistic self in favor of a self that is intrinsically connected to its social fabric (Bell 2023). The emphasis Taylor places on communal engagement as a linchpin for human identity and ethical conduct coheres remarkably well with the Confucian understanding of selfhood, which also accentuates the vital role of social structures and interpersonal relations in the formation of individual persona (Pohl 1999). This intellectual juxtaposition illuminated a collective emphasis on the salience of community and relational dynamics in shaping not just identity but also ethical propriety. This shared focus presents a formidable counterpoint to the predominant Western ideal, often embedded in theological discourse, that champions the individual as an insular entity fully capable of self-realization in isolation. Our research thus advances a nuanced re-evaluation of these individual-centric leanings that are prevalent in both Western philosophical and theological circles.

One of the pivotal aspects that enriches this comparative inquiry is our engagement with Warren G. Frisina's critical analysis of Charles Taylor's Sources of the Self (Frisina 2000). Frisina astutely identifies a lacuna in Taylor's scholarship—namely, the neglect of American pragmatic and process philosophies. This oversight gains particular significance when considered alongside Confucianism, which shares with these philosophies a rejection of the subjectivization of value. Frisina points to a fertile ground for synergistic dialogue between Taylorian and Confucian thought, especially concerning the reconceptualization of selfhood within a

cosmos replete with objective values (Frisina 2000, 124). By doing so, Frisina's critique extends our understanding of how Taylor's notion of hypergoods and Confucian virtues can be conceptually aligned. His work underlines the importance of transcending dualistic epistemologies in both Taylor's and Confucian frameworks and beckons toward a more comprehensive, multidimensional understanding of selfhood and ethical norms. Thus, incorporating Frisina's insights not only corroborates the essence of our comparative study but amplifies its intellectual breadth, enriching the dialogue between Western and Eastern ontologies and inviting further scholarly exploration into their potential intersections.

Moreover, this study contributes significantly to the evolving field of comparative theology—an interdisciplinary enterprise devoted to the interpretation and alignment of diverse religious constructs and methodologies. By examining the interplay between Communitarian and Confucian thought, we have offered a more textured understanding of how varying cultural, religious, and philosophical systems engage with the metaphysical and ethical inquiries that concern us all. Our examination of the theological and philosophical dimensions of individualism and community offers an enriched framework for understanding the complex interplay between the two. It serves as a compelling invitation to reconsider the role of community and relationships in our theoretical and practical engagements with questions of selfhood, ethics, and morality.

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