

Article

Beyond Cartesian Dualism: François Noël's Hybridization of Aristotelianism and Confucianism on the Voluntary and Involuntary

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Abstract

The article begins by examining Ricoeur's critique of the Cartesian understanding of the will, which ultimately leads Ricoeur to explore Aristotle's distinction between voluntary and involuntary acts. Later, Aquinas integrates Aristotle's insights into a creator/creatures framework by linking voluntary acts to the pursuit of beatitude and by integrating the affective and rational elements of human action in the reflective process that precedes action. In a different metaphysical context, Confucian accounts of moral agency, particularly in the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, highlight the role of bodily dispositions, affective responses, and ritualized learning in moral cultivation. Without sharply distinguishing between voluntary and involuntary acts, Confucianism views moral development as harmonizing inner movements through learning and ritual practices. But in Confucianism, too, shaping dispositions and evaluations of possible behaviors helps consider the agent as a whole. These examinations are possible because traditional resources provide a framework. From this perspective, François Noël (1651–1729), who like Descartes trained within a Jesuit scholastic context, provides a unique synthesis. In the *Third Treatise on Chinese Ethics* of his *Philosophia Sinica*, Noël interprets Confucian texts through the lens of Aristotelian and Scholastic frameworks, using Chinese examples to illustrate distinctions among voluntary actions: free, natural, spontaneous, and strictly voluntary. Noël seeks to show the value of ancient Chinese texts, their Neo-Confucian commentaries, and their compatibility with his tradition. By doing so, he also integrates Confucian moral psychology with the scholastic framework, proposing an anthropology that preserves the embodied, affective dimensions of agency while trusting the accountability of rationality, the ability of the agent to integrate different aspects of human life in a practical unity: the one able to take action.

**Keywords:** François Noël; virtue ethics; transcultural philosophy

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Introduction

During his imprisonment in Germany in World War II, Paul Ricoeur read *Ideen I* by Edmund Husserl, who was then blacklisted by the Nazis. While translating this book in its margins, Ricoeur reflected on the question: “Who is this human being able to commit both beautiful and horrible acts?” He used this forced retreat to move forward with a doctoral thesis on the problem of the relation between human nature and freedom. This was published in 1950 under the title *The Voluntary and Involuntary*. In this book, Ricoeur's purpose was to describe human beings' ability to act freely despite evil and fragility. Even

amid the vicissitudes of war and international tensions, one should be able to answer for one's deeds.

Ricoeur is, therefore, at the same time an heir of Husserl and a critic of the Cartesian approach to the idealized understanding of the will, insofar as Descartes delineates too sharply between abstract considerations, concrete principles, and circumstances guiding action.¹ For Ricoeur, the Cartesian approach does not describe a real human being, taken in the middle of affects and relationships, but rather an idea of it (Ricoeur [1950] 2009, p. 19). In transcendental descriptions, freedom to act seems to be given when, in reality, many obstacles are present and resist engaged action, what Aristotle calls the particulars.² In “real” daily life, the distinction between fundamental structures of the will, passions, the body, and what is related to moral evil is blurred. Criticizing the Cartesian line of thought, Ricoeur notes that needs and habits are, in reality, not understandable solely as consequences of the involuntary, but should be regarded, in connection with a sense of belonging to a community, as indirect manifestations of the will. Considering the involuntary in the analysis of human ability to decide and act helps reintegrate bodily, affective, and psychological dimensions into reflection. This explains why, in the development of the *Voluntary and Involuntary*, Ricoeur relies more on Aristotle than on Descartes.³ He then continues to follow Aristotle in *Time and Narrative*, where he develops the idea that the structures of the will are affected by the symbolic objects engaged (the texts read). The Cartesian understanding of scholasticism shows that the rejection of the tradition(s) limits one's capacity to consider their resources as tools to shape inner dispositions. From this perspective, it's a pity that neither Descartes nor Ricoeur engaged with Confucianism and its potential to complement an Aristotelian approach. The present paper will argue that engagement with the Confucian and Aristotelian Classics, read with their commentaries, as exemplified by François Noël (1651–1729), concretely overcomes the Cartesian dichotomy between the voluntary and the involuntary by offering a unique framework for deliberation.

Like Descartes, François Noël was educated in the newly established Jesuit educational system of colleges, placing great importance on Coimbra's commentaries on Aristotle. In this educational system, the connection between the body, affects, and rational arguments was engaged through “physical” and “affective” exercises, such as performing theatre and the *disputatio* (see Levy and Kay 1996). François Noël, after studying philosophy at the University of Douai, was soon acknowledged as a teacher who would take the emotional dimension into account through the use of poetry and literature, before being sent to China in 1684 by his Jesuit superiors (Vendé 2023, pp. 17–31).

In 1711, Noël published at Prague his pioneering *Philosophia Sinica* (*Chinese Philosophy* 1711), a sophisticated and systematic account of Chinese philosophy in three treatises on metaphysics, ritual and ethics respectively.⁴ In this work, Noël seeks to reconstruct the contents of Confucian Classics and their Neo-Confucian commentaries for a European audience in an Aristotelian framework. Some of Noël's interpretations may seem forced in light of contemporary Sinology. Nonetheless, Noël's attempt to integrate scholastic-Aristotelian and Neo-Confucian perspectives often reveals surprising metaphysical and ethical correspondences that have passed unnoticed in contemporary comparative philosophy due to its neglect of commentarial traditions.⁵ In the *Third Treatise On Chinese Ethics*, Noël's scholastic reading of the Chinese classics lays the foundations for an anthropology that emphasizes the continuity between the body, affects, and reflection. As a corollary, he develops a hybrid understanding of human agency that emphasizes the importance of cultivating the psycho-physical material (*Qi* 氣), another way to describe the training of the self to assess different possible courses of action.⁶ This construction's subtlety is especially

evident in how Noël, drawing on Aristotle, treats the “voluntary and the involuntary” from the perspective of Chinese philosophy.

In this article, I will first introduce how Aristotle establishes the foundations for a reflection on the voluntary and the involuntary in the third book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and briefly outline how this tradition unfolds in scholasticism. In the second part, I will turn to the Chinese tradition and explain how, for Confucian philosophers, decisions are part of the process of constructing moral character through self-cultivation. In the last section, I will introduce how commentators, Zhu Xi and François Noël, offer new possibilities for overcoming the Cartesian dichotomy.

1. An Aristotelian Theme

In the Western tradition, reflections on the voluntary and involuntary are rooted in Aristotle’s considerations at the beginning of the third book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter, *NE*). This is also the tradition that provided Noël with a framework for reading the Confucian Classics, which Descartes opposed, and from which Ricoeur drew key concepts.

1.1. The Birth of the Voluntary and Involuntary

In the *NE*, after defining virtues as related to individual feelings and actions, Aristotle also notes that legislators should attend to virtues for the political community (*NE* 1109b30). Legislators have to encourage citizens to develop their virtues through laws, and in return, virtuous behavior will support the laws of the city (*Politics*, 1277b15–17). This is when Aristotle comes up with a definition of the involuntary:

Now, what is involuntary seems to be what comes about by force or because of ignorance. Also, what is forced is what has an external starting-point, that is, the sort of starting-point where the agent, or the one being affected, contributes nothing, as, for example, if the wind or human beings with control over him took him off somewhere. (*NE* 1110a)⁷

Two examples help Aristotle to go further: someone forced to do something under the threat of a tyrant or a captain who throws his cargo overboard in a storm. Both are acting under external pressure: their actions are a mixture of voluntary (internal principles) and involuntary (external principles), meaning that both voluntary and involuntary are subject to change over time. (*NE* 1110a15)

The definitions of voluntary and involuntary actions are not determined unconditionally; the specific circumstances, including the consequences (*NE* 1110b25), of an action are to be considered, which is where the decision-making process becomes complex. The same action, undertaken under different circumstances, does not receive the same moral evaluation. For example, the same practice intended to provide happiness may result in pain or shame, particularly when coerced (namely, a contra-voluntary action, as in the examples above). For Aristotle, this shows that feelings are important because when the outcomes of an action are pleasant, the agent is drawn to it by attraction.

Aristotle also considers the case in which an agent acts without knowing the circumstances or consequences. In this situation, moral action cannot be assessed in the same way because it is not the same to act because of ignorance of some particulars (for example, the consequences) or because an agent acts in ignorance because his perception is distorted (for example, when one is drunk). However, an action performed because of ignorance of the particulars often produces feelings of pain and shame (*NE* 1111a20). In other words, actions performed because of appetite or spirit (non-rational feelings) are not entirely involuntary nor entirely voluntary. Involuntary actions are no less human (*NE* 1111a35): if someone is unable to answer for his deeds, even the most spontaneous or automatic ones,

then one's sense of responsibility towards the *polis*, which defines citizens' identity, would be in danger (*Politics* 1277b15–17). As shown below in Section 1.3, these views will be developed in scholasticism and will become a subject of heated debate between Jesuits and Port-Royal thinkers when Noël studied at the University of Douai and when he returned to Europe after his stay in China.⁸

1.2. Aristotelian Deliberation (*Bouleusis*)

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, after defining what is voluntary and what is involuntary, Aristotle turns to the issue at stake behind these definitions. For Aristotle, deliberate decisions as rational choices define the voluntary:

Deliberate choice, then, is apparently something voluntary, although not the same as what is voluntary, which extends more broadly. (*NE* 1111b7)

There is a difference between rational human beings and animals (and children) who act voluntarily but without deliberation (they only decide according to spirit and appetite). These distinctions are consistent with Aristotle's anthropological considerations on the tripartite soul: the development of rationality, the ability to move concepts thanks to language, implies education and is not actualized as such at birth. In an action, the appetite is only concerned with what is pleasant and painful. There is an ambiguity regarding the spirit because it can be a wish, a belief, or a deliberate choice, which are not the same thing. For Aristotle, deliberate choice only comes when the agent can do something about achieving the end he is aiming at (*NE* 1111b25). Therefore, deliberation is more about the means to reach the end than the end itself.

In contrast, the wish is focused on the end: in a wish, the end appears as an apparent or real good, depending on the character of the person (*NE* 1113a30). Regarding beliefs, they are about the end and the means, but they also seem external and are not assessed in the same way as wishes and choices. A belief is true or false, not good or bad, but clarifying it can lead to reconfiguring the emotions attached to it (Nussbaum 1994, pp. 69–72). Education can correct false beliefs, but these refer to intellectual virtues, not moral virtues, which cannot be taught (*NE* 1103a25)—those established by the *habitus* we take, i.e., by our repeated actions. Consequently, choices that implement *habitus* define the sort of human person we are (*NE* 1112a). This is also why several matters are out of the perimeter of deliberations: eternal things, phenomena that happen through a law of cause-and-effect necessity, or through hazard (*NE* 1112a25).⁹ However:

We do deliberate, though, about things that are up to us and doable in action, and these, in fact, are the remaining ones. For the causes of things seem to be nature, necessity, luck, and, furthermore, understanding and everything that comes about through a human being. Among human beings, however, each group deliberates about what is doable in action through itself. (*NE* 1112b30)

For Aristotle, deliberation concerns realistic activities we can do to achieve our goals, and the ultimate goal is living a flourishing life, *eudaimonia*.¹⁰ We do not deliberate about topics considered in exact sciences but about techniques, crafts, and arts such as medicine and navigation, “since we are more hesitant about them” (*NE* 1112b7). Deliberation comes when there is something (and that is not an end) that we cannot define by ourselves, but it is something we believe we can do. Some interpreters insist that deliberation is a backward process.¹¹ This view implies considering what an end is. For Aristotle, the end is not disconnected from the appropriate means that help to reach it at each step. In this instrumental perspective, deliberation builds a retro-sequence in which each step helps move to the next, with the end in mind. For this interpretation, the end must be secure in a derivational sense, preserving the goodness of the course of action.¹² The advantage of this interpretation is that it highlights the conjoint nature of knowledge of the end and

actions. Still, it is also important to remember that Aristotle acknowledges the importance of context changes. The investigation of what we know about actions' particulars (beliefs) is undertaken for the sake of other things: the consequences of the course of action are taken into consideration; it is a process that can be reassessed (EN 1111a5). This is also why, in deliberation, we can ask other people for their advice, for example, a friend we trust (NE 1112b25): it helps to have a better knowledge of timely particulars.

One risk in deliberation is that it can be limitless. The agent is sometimes caught in an infinite loop, failing to adjust to timely changes (he is then literally out of time). In deliberation, it is crucial to set limits on uncertainty. A choice ends the deliberation and orients the desire:

For having discerned as a result of deliberation, we desire in accord with our deliberation (NE 1113a10)

In time, desires shaped by choices will become a habitus that channels the involuntary and affects how each character perceives what is pleasant and what is not.¹³ In that sense, moral character is not disconnected from the ability to perceive.¹⁴ Our internal state, our virtue, is related to how we perceive goods, especially ends (NE 1114b). If it is not like this, no one is responsible for their actions in the city, and can do evil because of ignorance (NE 1114b5-10).

This is why, for Aristotle, there is a voluntary aspect to how human beings channel appetites and create habitus, i.e., virtues/vices, as human beings are contributing causes of their inner dispositions and their ability to perceive the particulars (our personal histories, and the histories of the communities to which we belong contribute to the level of agency freedom we have).¹⁵ Against some commentators, it is important to recall that, for Aristotle, moral deliberation is not just instrumental, as in geometry (even if logical operations are similar, their ends are different and affect the agent differently): moral deliberation shapes the agent's dispositions: it trains it to overcome voluntary and involuntary in a certain manner. In other words, Aristotle keeps the two types of virtues, intellectual and moral, connected, whereas the Cartesian approach will disconnect them.

1.3. From Aristotle to Aquinas

Aquinas (as well as Descartes and Noël) inherited Aristotle's reflections on the voluntary and involuntary. In questions 6 and 7 of the *Prima Secundae* in the *Summa Theologica* (hereafter *ST*), Aquinas discusses these notions and integrates them into the biblical framework structured by the creator/creature(s) pair of concepts. Aquinas insists on the combination of knowledge of the end and actions taken for the sake of the end:

ST Ia.IIae, Q6a1: [...] Now, in order for something to be done for the sake of an end, some sort of cognition (*cognitio*) of the end is required. Therefore, if a thing acts or is moved by an intrinsic principle in such a way that it has some sort of cognition (*notitia*) of the end, then it has within itself the principle of its act not only insofar as it acts, but also insofar as it acts for the sake of an end. [...] And so since both things—viz., acting and acting for the sake of an end—come from an intrinsic principle, their acts and movements are called 'voluntary'; for the name 'voluntary' signifies that the movement and the act come from the thing's own inclination (*sit a propria inclinatione*). And so it is that, according to the definition given by Aristotle, [...] what is said to be voluntary is not only "that whose principle is intrinsic" (*cuius principium est intra*), but also includes knowledge (*cum additione scientiae*). Hence, since human being especially has cognition of the end of his action and moves himself, voluntariness is found especially in his acts.¹⁶

Aquinas here introduces a distinction between actions and actions for the sake of the end. For him, acting voluntarily implies action and perfect knowledge of the end (which

implies affective and rational aspects of knowledge, as the will is a rational appetite proper to human beings, creatures whose end is to enter an affective and intellectual union with the creator; see *ST Ia.IIaeQ2*) (Westberg 1994, pp. 103–4). Like Aristotle, Aquinas holds that human acts are voluntary. In question 7, Aquinas examines how circumstances affect human decisions. This explains why, for Aquinas, violence, ignorance, fear, and sentient desire (concupiscence) are grounds for the involuntariness of human actions: they all alter the conjoint ability to know the end and/or act accordingly. Therefore, the challenge for Aquinas is to make the will undertake its function.¹⁷

Indeed, for Aquinas, human beings' specificity is to exercise dominion over their acts through deliberation, in which the free will chooses the good in accordance with one's nature and end (*ST Ia.IIae*, 1.1). In question 14 of the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas comments on Aristotle, drawing on Gregory of Nyssa and the scriptures, especially Paul. More specifically, in the *ST Ia.II.ae.Q14.a3*, Aquinas takes over the idea that deliberation is like conversing with a friend: individual beatitude is not disconnected from a broader scope, the one that puts the agent in a political context.¹⁸ This dimension of friendship highlights an element already present in Aristotle: moral decisions are not just about the good of the individual but also about the good of the political community. In that sense, Aristotle and Thomas not only reflect on voluntary and involuntary at an individual level but also consider an agent in relation to others. Between Aristotle and Aquinas, the latter further emphasizes the unifying dimension of practical action, a perspective that echoes Neo-Confucian commentators of the Classics (see Section 3.1) (Westberg 1994, pp. 165–66).

These reflections on Aristotle and the tradition he inspires stem from his examination of cultural customs and structuring habits. In contrast, even if Descartes' provisional morality does not ignore the importance of cultural habits, Descartes eliminates customs in favor of a universalism disconnected from concrete embodiment and creates an idea of the self. This perspective loses the social and historical dimension of character building, as Ricoeur pointed out in *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*. In the follow-up, *La Symbolique du Mal*, Ricoeur describes a concrete act of free will situated within cultural symbols and narratives. In contrast to the Cartesian approach, and similar to the Aristotelian perspective, Confucianism includes the social and historical dimensions, which imply a hermeneutics of symbols. Noël's presentation of Chinese Ethics, which draws on Aristotle and scholasticism, will highlight that a choice other than Cartesianism was possible.¹⁹ Traditions can be trusted (which does not mean that they should be examined). Besides, as Confucianism suggests, before engaging in a learning process, it is crucial to consider the body and emotions, which are shaped by habits (rituals), even before reflection begins.

2. Body, Emotions, and Learning in Ancient Confucianism

Analogous to the Aristotelian tradition, and unlike Cartesianism, in the Ancient Confucian Classics, the continuity across various layers of human life in reflective processes seems more evident.²⁰ This does not imply that there is no distinction between different aspects of human life in the *Analects* and in the *Mencius*, but the continuity between what Aristotle calls voluntary and involuntary seems more important than the discontinuity. In this part, I will argue that the purpose of ancient Confucian texts is less about distinguishing between different aspects of human actions and more about engaging in self-cultivation, learning to identify and channel inner movements, thanks to cultural resources such as the Classics, to respond to external events with a unified heart-mind. In that sense, the body, emotions, virtues, and will are rather perceived as continuous through the lens of a transformative process.

2.1. Self-Cultivation Through Learning in the *Analects*

The continuity between different layers of human life is highlighted at the beginning of the *Analects* (hereafter *An.*). In the first sentence, Confucius explains how emotional reactions shaped by learning progressively define one's character (*An.* 1.1). For some interpreters, all the records of the *Analects* can be seen as a manual for learning to identify, name, and channel inner movements to construct one's moral character, i.e., to develop an ability to handle what Aristotle names voluntary and involuntary movements in a process in which affects play a key role.²¹ In the *Analects*, it is the dialogue between two levels: the text received from tradition, upon which one has been reflecting (*An.* 2.15 & 19.6), and the "text of my life" which allows one to let Classics help the self handle inner movements.²² Several excerpts insist on cultivating an affective dimension thanks to the vocabulary and grammar of feelings offered by Classics:

An. 17.9: The Master said, "Little Ones, why do none of you learn the *Book of Poetry*? The *Book of Poetry* can be a source of inspiration and a basis for observation (*guan* 觀); it can help you to come together with others (*qun* 群), as well as to express complaints properly. At home, they teach you about how to serve your father, and in public life, they teach you about how to serve your lord. They also broadly acquaint you with the names of various birds, beasts, plants, and trees." (See also *An.* 16.13).²³

In this sentence, transmitted literature (the *Book of Poetry*) provides a vocabulary for naming feelings and natural elements. It also offers a framework for observing and evaluating behavior (*guan* 觀; see also *An.* 1.11), allowing participation in a human community. Inner movements, or Aristotle's "voluntary and non-voluntary" elements (such as emotions), are inhabited through the symbolic tools inherited within a community.²⁴ From this perspective, transmitted texts such as the *Classics* (as well as rituals) constitute a reservoir of symbolic resources that help one shape the agent's sensibility and construct social character, i.e., become a humane person with a role in a community (parallelism with the *Polis* in Aristotle).²⁵ This is how *Analects* 2.4, the traditional "biography" of Confucius, can be understood: it details a program of self-cultivation in which different parts of the human being (in Aristotelian terms, voluntary and involuntary parts, spirit, soul, and body) of human beings are integrated through engaging cultural tools, rather than providing precise historiographic details about Confucius' life.²⁶

Regarding defining human nature, in the *Analects*, the literary character "Confucius" does not speak much about it, except to mention that all human beings are endowed with the same material and capacities (*xing* 性). Still, practice makes it different (*An.* 5.13 & 17.2). In addition, unlike the *NE*, in the *Analects*, Confucius does not systematically expose distinctions between what happens at sensitive, affective, and rational levels. However, Confucius does mention that there is a need for reflection (*si* 思) in choices that embrace both "voluntary and involuntary" elements (*An.* 15.10). This is also reinforced by the invitation to self-examination (*fanxing* 反省). In *Analects* 1.4, behavior in relationships—to be loyal to one's role (*zhong* 忠) and trustful (*xin* 信)—is subject to self-examination. For Confucius, the examination is a turn inside (*An.* 4.17) and, in a process, to become comfortable with one's interiority (*An.* 12.4), which does not mean that one becomes complacent, but that one's behavior adjusts to the moral requirement of becoming a humane person (*An.* 7.37). Rituals are another practice that emphasizes the distinction and continuity of different aspects of human life: the practice of rituals affects the body and the heart of the agent (*An.* 12.1).²⁷

This emphasis on continuity between cultivating affects and behaviors does not mean that, in the *Analects*, all organs are the same (see *An.* 15.10) or that Confucius and his disciples do not distinguish among different aspects of human life. For example, the heart-mind

(*xin* 心) is presented as an organ of desire (*An.* 2.4), the core of moral intention (*An.* 6.7), ideally not only involved with food matters (*An.* 17.22) but also able to examine, i.e., to assess moral dispositions (*An.* 20.1) and with a desire of accomplishment “for others” (*An.* 14.39). Several sentences of the *Analects* also depict bodily actions (*gong* 躬 in *An.* 7.33, 10.4–5), the notion of “face” (*se* 色, *An.* 1.3, 2.8, 5.19, ...), and the question of bodily needs for sleep (*An.* 10.6.8.16), food (*An.* 1.14, 4.9, 7.16), or sex (*An.* 9.18).²⁸

The plurality of these anthropological references shows that continuity is achieved through exercises, aided by symbolic resources. The agent is formed by reading Classics, commenting on them (and performing rituals). These exercises create a space in which desires, intentions, and conduct can take shape. Traditions are not only useless external constraints on knowledge, as Descartes would argue, but also the very medium through which real agency (the one integrating voluntary and involuntary in Aristotelian terms and able to know and act) becomes articulated.

This logic of formation through inherited symbolic mediations is not limited to the Confucian tradition; it also illuminates, by contrast, the way Cartesian self-positioning remains dependent on the very traditions it seeks to contest (see Boulnois 2021). In this sense, Ricoeur’s use of philosophical traditions to oppose Descartes’ self-positioning echoes the Confucian insistence on interacting with the *Classics*. Zhu Xi and François Noël’s commitments to the *Mencius* constitute another step in this process (see the third part). Indeed, the *Mencius* greatly influenced Noël and is a step toward unfolding a tradition that provides tools to overcome the voluntary-involuntary dichotomy.

2.2. Mencius on Preserving the Heart and Discriminating Between Different Desires

In the *Mencius*, expressions such as “The great person does not lose the child’s heart-mind” (*bushiqichizhixin* 不失其赤子之心”, *Mencius* 4B12), “preserving the heart-mind” (*cunxin* 存心”, *Mencius* 4B28), and “keeping a stable heart-mind” (*hengxin* 恆心, *Mencius* 1A7 & 3A3) show the importance of preserving the heart-mind and making it stable, i.e., able to deal with different types of inner movements, needs, and appetites. In *Mencius* 1A7, the problem of how to deal with the different concurrent desires that inhabit the human heart in continuity with the body is introduced through the figure of King Xuan of Qi.²⁹ This historical character is first animated by the desire to act as a true king, something the Chinese text emphasizes by using *wang* (王) as an “action-verb”:

Mencius 1A7: The king said, “What must one’s Virtue be like to become a true king?” (*Ze keyi wang yi* 則可以王矣?) Mencius said, “One who protects the people becomes a true king, and no one can stop him.” (*Baomin er wang, mozhi neng yuye* 保民而王，莫之能禦也) [The King answered]: “Could someone like me protect the people?” [...]

The first desire that inhabits the King’s heart is to behave as a King, and it is up to Mencius’ finesse to bring out this desire through an inquiry that looks quasi-similar to a Socratic dialogue (Chen 2012). In the process, Mencius will focus on the role of the heart-mind (*xin* 心):

Mencius 1A7: [Mencius said “It is by weighing (*quan* 權) that we know which things are light and which are heavy, and by measuring (*du* 度) that we know which are long and which are short. This is true of all things, and especially so about the heart-mind (*xin* 心). May it please the king to measure (*du* 度) his heart-mind. When the king raises arms, endangers his subjects, and excites the enmity of the other feudal lords—does this perhaps bring pleasure to his heart-mind?” The king replied, “No. How could I take pleasure in this? It is just that I seek to realize what I greatly desire.”

Mencius' reply highlights a function of the heart-mind here: it is an ability to weigh (*quan* 權)—an activity close to evaluating (*guan* 觀) mentioned above—that appears when it comes to perceiving compassion (which is referred to by “*ceyinzixin* 惻隱之心” in *Mencius* 2A6).³⁰ To measure the heart-mind means accepting to contrast and assess which kind of movement is taking the lead in it, to reflect on oneself (*fanshen* 反身, *Mencius* 4A12 & 7A4), which is another manner of speaking about deliberation and examining oneself (see *An*. 1.4 mentioned above and the *Zhongyong* 中庸).³¹ In *Mencius* 1A7, Mencius examines common desires that everybody shares:

Mencius 1A7: Mencius said, “Is it that the king does not have enough rich and sweet foods to satisfy his mouth? Or enough light and warm clothing for his body? [...] The king's ministers are sufficient to provide for all of this. How could the king's desire be for any of these things?”

[The King] said, “No, it is none of these.”

Mencius said, “Then what the king greatly desires can be known. He desires to expand his territory, to bring Qin and Chu into his court, to rule the Central Kingdom, and to pacify the four Yi. But to pursue such a desire by acting in the way you do is like climbing a tree in search of a fish.”

The king said, “Is it as bad as that?”

[Mencius replied] “It is even worse.”

Mencius is here relying on the experience that all human beings are made of the same material (*Mencius* 2A2), not only at a sensitive level (*Mencius* 7B24) but also at a moral level (*Mencius* 7B31). This second layer is in continuity with the first one and needs to be developed (see the controversy with Gaozi in *Mencius* 6A1-6) (Tao 2009). After this beginning, the relationship between King Xuan of Qi and Mencius evolves. Later in the text, the King finally asks Mencius for advice on establishing a true royal government (*xingwangzheng* 行王政, *Mencius* 1B5). In Mencius' answer, the description of ideal government focuses on the care of vulnerable people (foreigners, widows, orphans, etc.) in public action. This perspective encompasses individual behaviors and tax system issues, i.e., how to allocate resources to different needs in a community. At the end of this section comes a quotation from the *Classics of Poetry*, already evoked by the king in 1A7. This is one way to refer to the common cultural background shared by the interlocutors (as in *An*. 1.15) and to support a political vision.³² The dialogue then displays how the king, moved by the desire to act as a true king, sees this deepest desire being covered by others that stifle it:

Mencius 1B5: [...] Mencius said, “Since your Majesty deems them excellent, why do you not practice them?”

The King answered: “I have an infirmity, I am fond of wealth.”

[Mencius's reply was], “Formerly, Gong Liu was fond of wealth. It is said in the *Book of Poetry*, ‘He reared his ricks, and filled his granaries, he tied up dried provisions and grain, [...]’ In this way, those who remained in their old seat had their ricks and granaries, and those who marched had their bags of provisions. It was not till after this that he thought he could begin his march. If your Majesty loves wealth, give the people the power to gratify the same feeling, and what difficulty will there be in your attaining the royal sway?” [...]

In front of the “king's confession” of not being able to listen and enact the genuine desire to act as a king, Mencius quotes an ancient text. The cultural object serves as a trigger to contrast the sovereign's heart-mind. By frequenting the Classics, one learns to recognize the right pattern of actions among different types of inner movements.³³ This is

also a way to refer to a common political ideal and to invite people to join a process. It is then repeated with another dimension:

Mencius 1B5 [...] The king said, “I have an infirmity; I am fond of beauty.”

[Mencius’s reply was], “Formerly, King Tai was fond of beauty and loved his wife. It is said in the *Book of Poetry*, ‘Gu Gong Tan Fu, Came in the morning, galloping his horse, [...] Along with the lady of Jiang, they came and together chose the site for their settlement.’ At that time, in the seclusion of the house, there were no dissatisfied women, and abroad, there were no unmarried men. If your Majesty loves beauty, let the people be able to gratify the same feeling, and what difficulty will there be in your attaining the royal sway?’ (*yu wangheyou* 於王何有)

First, Mencius recalls an orderly way to limit one’s appetites through rituals. He then quotes the *Book of Poetry* with a line that dislodges the idea that one can get stuck in the situation of one’s appetite overwhelming the rest. The problem is less exhausting one’s heart (“*jinxin* 盡心” in *Mencius* 1A3 & 1A7) to achieve the desire of being a good king than reorienting efforts.³⁴ Energy should be directed at preserving the heart and making it stable and sincere through examination. This process should also reorganize the hierarchy of desires, appetites, and movements, and put the desire to be a good king first. A form of evaluation unifies different aspects of the king’s life—analogue to Aristotelian deliberation, enacted in actions as Aquinas insists—and helps overcome the distinction between “voluntary and involuntary”. This process can be achieved thanks to the framework for evaluating and integrating the different aspects of human life proposed by the *Classics* (and *Rituals*), which, for Mencius, is an exercise that provides great joy (*Mencius* 7A4).

In this section, I have explored how ancient Confucian texts emphasize the continuity between different aspects of human development, with the *Analects* portraying Classical texts (and *Rituals*) as tools for cultivating one’s moral character through identifying and naming emotions and self-examination. The heart-mind functions as both an organ of desire and the place of moral intention, requiring proper cultivation through a step-by-step learning process that integrates bodily actions, inner movements, and rational reflection—a view later developed by Neo-Confucian commentators like Zhu Xi, who stressed the importance of preserving one’s “original heart-mind”, an interpretation indebted to the *Mencius* (see hereafter). For the *Mencius*, “preserving one’s childlike heart-mind” and developing moral stability illustrate how one’s authentic moral inclinations can overwhelm competing desires by developing the ability to respond appropriately to social situations. By engaging with examination and text reading, individuals learn to organize their desires, placing moral aspirations and social responsibilities above personal appetites, ultimately leading to a joyful integration of one’s inner movements into a positioning of oneself (*li* 立).

Placed within an anthropological perspective that does not use the Cartesian dichotomy between the body and the soul, the Aristotelian question of the “voluntary and the involuntary” focuses on heart-mind dispositions in continuity with the body and their progressive shaping by cultural mediations, and on their unification through examination and reflection that lead to action. When Ricoeur turns to the analysis of narrative identity in *Time and Narrative*, after *Symbolique du mal*, he highlights the role of symbols as cultural tools provided by traditions in character-building, as emphasized by Confucianism in this article. François Noël’s hybrid construction will show that the Confucian approach, which emphasizes the need to refine inner continuity, can resonate with the Aristotelian tradition vocabulary. The perspective initiated by Confucius and continued by the *Mencius* has given rise to neo-Confucian and Jesuit commentaries. The interpretations of Zhu Xi and François Noël are therefore rooted in the initial folds of these traditions, but they do not preclude their encounter.

3. Commentaries Are Bridges Beyond Dichotomy

I have presented how the Confucian tradition developed a perspective in which continuity between different aspects of human life is more important than discontinuity. This perspective will resonate more with Aristotelian-type thought than with those who place greater emphasis on discontinuity, as in Descartes.³⁵ Commentaries on Aristotle, the *Analects*, and the *Mencius* will make this tendency even more evident.

3.1. Zhu Xi Commentary

In the later development of Confucianism, the dimension of turning back to the heart, of examining one's life (*Mencius* 7A4), and of developing one's human nature and sprouts of morality as a process of integrating the "voluntary and involuntary" in deliberation and practical behavior, will be interpreted in different ways.³⁶

As for Zhu Xi, when commenting on the first occurrence of the heart-mind in the *Analects* 2.4, which details Confucius' self-cultivation program, quoting Hu Yin (胡寅, 1098–1156), Zhu Xi details how following the desires of the heart and preserving the original heart-mind, through transmitted cultural mediations, will put different dimensions of human life in harmony:

Confucius said: "[...] At seventy, one can follow one's heart's desire without going beyond the rules." [...]

Hu Yin says: "The sage teaches in many ways, but the key is to keep people from losing their original heart and mind (*bu shi qi benxin* 不失其本心). If you want to reach this heart-mind, you should be determined to learn what the Sages have taught and follow their order. And then it will progress. When there is no flaw left, and all coherences are fully understood, in daily life, (if) the original heart-mind is clear, everything is done according to one's will (*benxin yingran sui suo yiyu* 本心瑩然, 隨所意欲). All patterns-coherences can (then) be reached. The heart-mind is the substance, desire is the function, the substance is the way, and the function is the meaning, the sound is the rule, and the body is the measure (*Sheng wei lü er shen wei du yi* 聲為律而身為度矣)."³⁷

In this commentary, the insistence is put on following each step, something consistent with Zhu Xi's understanding of learning³⁸, which is deeply connected with his reading of the *Mencius*, where a continuity of human material, a common human nature, is to be channeled and trained to become a human being able to endorse responsibilities (*Mencius* 1A7 & 2A2). In Confucianism, the inscription of the body in a lineage (*An* 8.3) of the living is an integral part of learning to be human; equally, the inscription of a text in a tradition reveals its transformed and transforming dimension (Vendé 2024). Therefore, the evolution of vocabulary across the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, the Neo-Confucian masters, and Zhu Xi shows a continuity of interpretation in situating work on oneself and work on texts within a tradition. It is the same continuous practice, thanks to symbolic tools from tradition, which allows one to harmonize different aspects of human life and to take a stand in social life. Analogically, when Aquinas forces his readers to explore different perspectives in the *Summa*, he is also attending to shape their dispositions (see Section 1.3).

Commenting on *Mencius* 7A4, Zhu Xi insists on searching for the patterns and coherences of life to the point of moral integration where actions unfold naturally, not disconnecting intellectual and physical levels:

When one turns inward to examine oneself (*fanshen er cheng* 反身而誠) [...] and knows intellectually and morally the patterns-coherences (*er suo bei zhi li* 而所備之理) as naturally evident as the instinctive aversion to a foul odor (*jie ru e e xiu* 皆如惡惡臭) or the spontaneous attraction to beauty, then one's actions will

require no forced effort and will encounter no difficulty. In such a state, what joy could be greater than this?³⁹

In the *Collected Conversations of Master Zhu*, Zhu Xi also comments on self-examination as a unifying process of different aspects of human life:

Someone asked, “What does it mean to ‘turn inward and exhaust patterns-coherences?’” (*fanshen qiongli* 反身窮理)” Zhu Xi replied, “To ‘turn inward’ means to engage practice with application, to turn to oneself and search [pattern-coherence] within oneself.”⁴⁰

In other words, for Zhu Xi, preserving the mind is part of a self-cultivation process in which symbolic tools inherited from tradition help integrate moral and theoretical knowledge. As Curie Virag comments:

According to Zhu Xi, the *Mencius* ought to be understood as a text dealing essentially with “preserving the mind” 存心 and “nourishing the moral nature” 養性. [...] Such an approach can be seen in his account of reading as a process that engages both mind and body and in his view of learning more generally as a vehicle for cultivating one’s moral and physical nature (Virág 2015, pp. 1189–90).

The heart and the body are not two organs competing against each other, as in a Cartesian perspective, but a continuum of human material that needs to be refined thanks to learning. From that perspective, if one cannot change directly “involuntary actions” (needs and appetites are still present and to be honored in *Mencius*’ perspective), he can at least choose to engage in the process and the mediations (friendship, Classics, rituals,...) that help to refine both heart-mind and body (*Eudæmonia* in Aristotelian terms or *Beatitudo* in Aquinas). This echoes what Aristotle describes in *NE* Book II.1: through the notion of *habitus*, inner dispositions are shaped to help us respond to external circumstances.

This anthropology presents the human being as first conceived as a flow of material (not disconnecting what is called voluntary and involuntary in Aristotelian terms) in constant motion, capable of structuring itself. The challenge is maintaining a steady flow and achieving stability in movement by ordering appetites and channeling them through the Classics and rituals.⁴¹

Zhu Xi’s thought interests lie in systematizing the reading of the *Classics* and the articulation of different types of knowledge, emphasizing how the unification of the person occurs in learning, which is already a mode of training in deliberation and action.

3.2. François Noël

If Zhu Xi is commenting on the Ancient Classics in the context of *Daoxue* debates, François Noël engages Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism from a scholastic background amid controversies.⁴² At the beginning of the fourth chapter of the *Third Treatise, Philosophia Sinica*, he states that human actions have two properties: voluntary or involuntary, and good or evil.⁴³ He introduces Confucianism through an Aristotelian lens:

First, according to Aristotle, voluntary [action] can be classified into four modes. First, *free* [action is] that which is done by an elective will. Second, *natural* [action is] that which results from an intrinsic principle acting according to a natural impulse, such as a stone descending naturally. Third, *spontaneous* [action is] that which is carried out from an intrinsic principle with some imperfect knowledge, as seen when animals spontaneously seek pasture. Lastly, *strictly voluntary* [action] is executed by an intrinsic principle that knows the particulars in which an action consists. In the same way, the Chinese suggest that there are these four modes of voluntary action (Noël 1711, III. 4, p. 103).

These definitions follow Aristotle's ones in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, but Noël's originality comes afterward in using Chinese texts to "prove" this framework:

In the first place, they say: as soon as the disciple Yan Hui recognized the middle in a matter of virtue, he promptly chose it and grasped it firmly as if with both hands to achieve [it] through effort (A). This voluntary [action] is understood as *free* (ibid.).

The quote (A) that supports this affirmation comes from Zhang Juzheng's (張居正, 1525–1582) commentary on the *Zhongyong*, where it is affirmed that:

[Yan Hui] consistently strove to discern the unchangeable mean of virtue in any matter. Once he identified it and understood its true reason, he immediately embraced it, firmly grasping it as if with both hands to achieve [it] by work, placing it close to his heart, fearing that he might forget or lose it (Noël 1711, III. 4, p. 104).

Achieving a stable heart amid the flow means identifying inner movements and choosing the one that leads to the appropriate disposition. Then Noël continues to detail other characteristics of the Chinese understanding of the "voluntary and the involuntary":

Second, water descends because of natural gravity (B). This voluntary [action] is understood as *natural*.

Third, birds know how to build nests, feed their young, etc. They possess a certain sense of knowledge and piety, but only in an imperfect way that is significantly different from that of humans; they cannot reason (C). This voluntary [action] is understood as *spontaneous*.

Fourth, Emperor Shun, upon hearing the arguments and points from each side, meticulously weighed them, reduced everything to the means of justice, and then fulfilled it through diligent effort (D). This action is understood as *strictly voluntary* (Noël 1711, III. 4, p. 103).

What Aristotle describes through the image of a falling stone is here transformed into water, a traditional image in Chinese philosophy; see (Oh 2018; Fu 2023). Quote (B) comes from Zhang Juzheng's commentary on *Mencius* 6A2, where Noël introduces the notion of gravity (*gravitas*), a typical Western notion. Noël continues to embed the Chinese perspective within an Aristotelian framework, using quotes (C) from the *Xingli Daquan* (性理大全, 1414) and Zhang Juzheng's commentaries on the *Mencius*. Quote (D) goes back to Zhang Juzheng's commentary on the *Zhongyong*, and it echoes what I have developed in Section 2.2 on the function of (*quan* 權) and (*du* 度):

D. 6. *Sishu zhijie*, volume 2, *Zhongyong*, article 6 states the following about Emperor Shun: "While delivering sound counsel and upright words, it is often the case that some error is committed, either through deficiency or excess. Therefore, after considering the points and reasons presented by both sides, he swiftly weighed the matter within himself (*Quan hengliang du* 權衡量度), reducing everything to a single means of justice. Subsequently, he [implemented] the actions to bring the matter to completion. Indeed, when a statement conforms to reason, it is naturally praiseworthy. However, some arguments may be somewhat excessive, while others may fall short, and thus, they may not necessarily align with the principle of the Mean. Therefore, among the various differing opinions, one must consider both extremes, weigh and measure them carefully, and only adopt that which is most appropriate and unifies them into a balanced whole." (Noël 1711, III. 4, p. 105)

Regardless of whether this translation is faithful to the original Chinese, the connection between this passage and what I have developed on self-examination as a means of

integrating different inner movements is self-evident. As for the definition of the voluntary, Noël will also rely on Confucian Classics to define terms:

Second, there are two forms of *strictly voluntary [action]*. One is a *direct* and intrinsic form of voluntary action. For example, the reason for which a man either advances or stops in the path of virtue comes from himself, just as the person who carries clay to build a rampart chooses to stop or continue based on his judgment (E). The other is an *indirect* and causal form of voluntary action. For example, many in the kingdom die of hunger because of the king's harshness, who fails to open the public storehouses (F). (Noël 1711, III. 4, p. 103)

Quote (E) is from Zhang Juzheng's commentary on *Analects* 9.19, where learning is compared to climbing a mountain. A voluntary action implies an affective disposition that allows its implementation. The challenge is, therefore, to have a heart-mind sufficiently settled on learning to create a habitus of frequenting the Classics to make the integration of different inner movements effective. Quote (F) refers to Zhang Juzheng's commentary on *Mencius* 1A3. Although King Hui of Liang exhausts himself trying to do good for his people, he fails to act like a true king as he fails to respect the inner rhythm of regeneration of natural and human resources. This is another way of pointing out rituals that organize the relationship between human beings and nature. In that sense, Noël's interpretation of *Mencius* 1A3 does not entirely hit the point. But in the next section, Noël shows interest in the ritualistic importance of the King's actions.

This goes with defining an involuntary action, something we do with our motion or virtue while resisting; following Aquinas's systematization of Aristotle (see Section 1.3), Noël explains that there are four factors explaining it:

The first is *force*, or violence, such as the forced giving of wine and rice that the petty king Ge extorted from the stewards of King Tang (G).

The second is *ignorance*, such as the transgression of the law, which the people do not know (H).

The third is the *concupiscent desire* to pursue a good, such as a hardened habit of stealing (I).

The fourth is *fear* as a means to avoid evil, such as the arranged marriage of a daughter, whom the petty king of the Kingdom of Qi handed over to the petty king of the Kingdom of Wu out of fear of his power, which he could not resist (K). (ibid.)

All the examples used here come from Zhang Juzheng's commentary on the *Mencius*, Quote (G), when he comments on *Mencius* 1A5 (*Mencius* starts with the saying "A humane man lacks an adversary") and 3B5, which is about fulfilling rituals, i.e., respecting tempos that deal with nature. This combination of excerpts from different parts of the *Mencius* shows a tendency to systematize the readings. Quote (H) is from *Mencius* 3A5, and, again, Noël's use is not wrong, but it decontextualizes the original text from *Mencius*, as it initially highlights that bad social conditions can force people into unlawful action out of desperation. In contrast, in Noël's use, it focuses on the ignorance which the *Mencius*'s text does not mention. The same mechanism of systematization is also present in Quote (H), which combines *Mencius* 3A5 and *Mencius* 2A6.⁴⁴ Quote (I) comes from *Mencius* 3B7, and this time, it can be said that Noël respects *Mencius*'s text's original intention in inviting the ruler to moderation. Quote K refers to the text of *Mencius* 4A7, and, again, Noël, by putting this text forward, highlights an element of fear that motivates the king that is not present in the original text of *Mencius*, nor in the commentary quoted but highlighted in Aquinas.

In this section, I explored commentaries that resonate across traditions, proposing ways to guide one's life by making decisions that consider the whole of the individual and

the essential role of the “heart-mind” as an organ that integrates different perspectives in the process. Here, the importance of the *Mencius* for Zhu Xi and François Noël as a text that proposes criteria for self-cultivation, integration, and the hierarchization of desires within the person is evident. These echoes occur within frames that valorize continuity, rather than Descartes’s perspectives, which emphasize discontinuities. François Noël was influenced by Neo-Confucianism, which holds that self-examination is an integrative process in which moral actions become “natural”. For Zhu Xi, “preserving the mind” is indeed part of a process in which symbolic tools inherited from tradition help integrate different dimensions of human life (in Aristotelian terms, the voluntary and the involuntary). Unlike the Cartesian perspective, the heart and body form a continuum that needs to be refined through learning. Paul Ricoeur’s development of the narrative identity, in which the process of *mimesis* enables the agent to unify the different aspects of his life and take a stand, can resonate with the Neo-Confucian approach. François Noël is here an early and forgotten witness of this possible dialogue between tradition.

Conclusions

Encounters between Eastern and Western traditions, like Noël’s *Philosophia Sinica*, display hybrid anthropologies in which the human being is conceived as a continuum in perpetual motion in relation to a creator. For the creature, the challenge is maintaining this flow in a certain equilibrium, finding stability in movement by ordering appetites and channeling them through cultural symbolic tools such as Classics and rituals, as Confucianism invites. This echoes the Aristotelian interpretation of the voluntary and involuntary described in the first part, which takes place in the context of the Greek *polis*, where the political body is involved in shaping citizens’ dispositions and providing them with the tools to integrate different aspects of their lives, a perspective later incorporated into a biblical framework by scholasticism. Here, the creator has given all the creature(s) the ability to perform voluntary actions at birth, without devaluing the involuntary as such (it is much more the refusal to enter into a process of refining the self and hierarchizing movements that would be criticized), which is also a positive gift from the creator. This process will ultimately lead to the complete union of the creature(s) with the creator at the end of times. If the creator may assist the creature throughout the historical process of integrating different aspects of human life through his grace in a sufficient but not necessary way, the creator’s help does not oblige the creature, who remains free to reject the relationship thanks to his autonomy. This process relies heavily on habits and rituals, i.e., the integration of voluntariness and involuntariness, in relation to cultural means. Then, if the creator allowed a diversity of cultures and religions to exist, including significant symbolic tools found in non-biblical traditions, those symbolic tools, like the Confucian Classics, should be able to engage the conversation with what the integration of biblical and Greek resources has generated, despite some negotiated tensions. As new commentaries on Aristotle and a new reading of Aquinas developed in the 16th and 17th centuries in the Jesuit colleges, Descartes’ challenge to tradition may have been inevitable (and may remain something desirable in some circumstances). When Descartes published his *Principia philosophiae* in 1644, he aimed to offer a manual that would replace the Coimbra commentaries. A few years later, his thought found some space in the first Jesuit manual of philosophy in French, published in 1653. But in these years, intellectual conflicts over the interpretation of Augustine and morality were raging in France, as was the Rites Controversy, which was starting to take off. It was in this context that Noël’s *Philosophia Sinica* was published, and the way topics were treated in this work would become inaudible to guardians of orthodoxy (either Catholic or Confucian), as orthodoxies do not accommodate well processes of deliberation and discernment. Therefore, François Noël’s historical engagement with the Confucian

Classics and their Neo-Confucian commentaries highlights the limits of the Cartesian perspective and its historical development in Phenomenology. Ricoeur's turn from Husserl to Hermeneutics is another example of the need to rely on symbolic tools from traditions to articulate the voluntary and involuntary in a human being able to deliberate and enact the right action, the one for which he will be accountable.

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Notes

- ¹ See the classical commentary by Etienne Gilson in (Descartes [1925] 1987, pp. 236–37).
- ² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III.1, 1111a3.
- ³ On the relationship between Aristotle, Coimbra's commentaries and Descartes regarding the soul and the body; see (Byers 2006).
- ⁴ For an English translation of the *First Treatise*, see (Meynard and Canaris 2023). For an English translation of the *Third Treatise*, see (Canaris et al., Forthcoming).
- ⁵ See for instance Noël's use of Suárezian metaphysics in his reading of the *Book of Changes* (Canaris 2026).
- ⁶ As François Noël is influenced by Neo-Confucianism in the *Philosophical Sinica*, it makes sense to adopt this terminology. On this approach to *Qi*, see (Angle and Tiwald 2017, p. 23).
- ⁷ In this paper, I am using (Aristotle 2014).
- ⁸ In one of his letters, Noël shows worries about the Jansenists/Jesuits controversy about the ability to act freely; see (Rule 2003, p. 24).
- ⁹ This dimension becomes less clear in Aquinas; see (Irwin 1990).
- ¹⁰ "Necessary conditions of a character (and, for Aristotle, a conception of good living) are that agents think of themselves as connected with the future in virtue of living lives that express some overall pattern or fit of ends in and through time. [...] In short, the good life must be a shared life, lived with friends and marked by common interests and plans" (Sherman 1985, pp. 100 and 103).
- ¹¹ This point has been a subject of debate in the recent years, as for some, a choice, as the result of successful deliberation pick up an option over another (Evaluative model), and for others, it's choosing one action before another in a causal sequence (Causal Discovery Model). Callard and Sherman belong to the last category. "Aristotle thinks that the deliberator begins with a goal or target or end, the realization of which is both desirable and difficult: she cannot immediately see how to bring it about. Drawing the end into the sphere of her own agency, she eventually hits upon something she sees she can do. This action then becomes the object of her choice. Aristotle's agent evaluates neither the goal with which she begins her deliberation nor the action in which her deliberation ends. Instead, her deliberation consists in the mental activity of deriving the action from the goal. [...] Aristotle states explicitly, by way of the comparison with analysis, that deliberation is unidirectional: it moves backwards from the end to the action" (Callard 2021, pp. 127–32).
- ¹² *ibid.*, p. 133: If you let the end out of your hands and entrust it to a genie or magical force, there is no guarantee it will stay good. That's the job of practical reasoning.
- ¹³ From Aristotle's perspective, the capacity to perceive has a potential of perceiving that needs to be actualized have to be "educated" and formed. See Aristotle's theory of sensation and perception as developed in *De Anima* 416b30 and following.
- ¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 134: "when virtuous people deliberate about how to get wealth, or health, or victory, they are deliberating about how to get things that really are good for them, whereas vicious people are deliberating about how to get things that only appear good to them".
- ¹⁵ Callard, "Aristotle on Deliberation," *ibid.*, p. 136: "If the passions are mal-educated, then when the person takes as his end things like health, wealth, safety, victory and honor, those ends will not in fact be good for him. An unjust desire for wealth or a cowardly desire for safety sends reason off on a wild goose chase, bent on "preserving" a good that is not there". See also (Westberg 1994, pp. 193–94).
- ¹⁶ I am using here the *New English Translation of St. Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae* (Aquinas 2025).

- 17 “The whole process of good human action is seen as the perfection of the will towards its object, first towards the end, then towards the means, finally to obtaining the end” (Westberg 1994, p. 124).
- 18 ST Ia.II.ae.Q14.a3: “Counsel properly implies a conference held between several; the very word [*consilium*] denotes this, for it means a sitting together [*considium*], from the fact that many sit together in order to confer with one another.”
- 19 For a broad presentation of the spectrum of possibilities in relation to scholasticism in the 17th century, see (Novotný 2009).
- 20 An on-going debate about the distinction mind–body in Chinese philosophy as the set of terms used to designate different aspects of human life. See (Ames 1993) and (Slingerland 2018). In this paper, I adopt the perspective defended by (Pan 2017).
- 21 Chen Shaoming develops this perspective in several articles. See (Chen 2016). See also (Virág 2017).
- 22 Attributed to Lu Xiangshan, the expression “The Six Classics annotate me, and I annotate the Six Classics” (liujing zhu wo, wo zhu liujing 六經注我, 我注六經) has long been used in this sense within the commentarial tradition. See (Liu 2009, p. 65).
- 23 For quotations from Chinese texts, I rely on the versions presented by (Sturgeon 2011). For the *Analects*, I complete and correct thanks to the translations of Roger Ames and Edward Slingerland; for the *Mencius*, Séraphin Couvreur and Irène Bloom. For Zhu Xi, I also compare with Daniel Gardner and Philip Ivanhoe’s translations.
- 24 “One should not neglect the possible effectiveness of conscious and more direct control of emotions. The Confucians believed in the power of the heart-mind to reflect on its own most minute workings and through awareness of these workings to redirect its own activities so as to orient them in an ethical direction” (Virág 2017, p. 194).
- 25 For more on the role ethics dimension, see (Rosemont et al. 2016).
- 26 Zhu Xi in the *Lunyu Jizhu* 《論語集注》, directly connects *Analects* 2.4 with the *Great Learning* and its educational program.
- 27 For more on the rituals influence on the agent, see (Csikszentmihalyi 2004, p. 14 and followings).
- 28 From this perspective, the “body” in the *Analects*, is always understood at different levels called to integration with an environment thanks to the symbolic tools of a culture. See (Ames et al. 2014, pp. 131–32): “In the pre-Qin documents, the graph for “body” (*ti* 體) appears with three alternative semantic classifiers—“bones” (*gu* 骨), “lived, vital body” (*shen* 身), and “flesh” (*rou* 肉). [...] At the most primordial level, the body via these three mutually entailing modalities—the discursive, vital, and carnal bodies—serves as the bond that correlates our subjectivity with our environments and that mediates the processes of thinking and feeling with our emerging patterns of conduct”.
- 29 For a presentation of the rational argumentation in *Mencius* 1A7, see (Yang 2013).
- 30 “Developing compassion into a virtue, therefore, requires the development of good judgment, of *quan* 權, weighing or discretion” (Wong 2015, p. 35).
- 31 On the limits of identifying Confucian self-examination with ancient Greek practices of the self, see (Peng 2019, pp. 16–29). For the presence of self-exercise and spiritual transformation within Confucian traditions, see (Vendé 2024).
- 32 On the use of Classics in argumentation, see (Huang 2001).
- 33 “Mencius has a conception of how we can engage in reflection about reasons. Such reflection is based on the recognition of patterns, which, as already noted, goes into the basic structure of emotion in both its motivational and cognitive components” (Wong 2015, p. 36).
- 34 Regarding *jin xin* 盡心’s role and interpretation in relation with *jingxin* 盡性, see (Huff 2023).
- 35 For a development on that point, see (Vendé 2025).
- 36 For an overview of Mencius’ human nature interpretation in Confucianism’s history, see (Huang 2023, p. 147 and followings).
- 37 Zhu Xi, *Collected Commentaries on the Analects* (*Lunyu jizhu* 論語集注), “For the Practice of Government” (*Wei zheng* 為政), Chapter 2, Section 4.
- 38 Daniel Gardners’ works and articles have thoroughly explore this dimension. See (Makeham 2003, p. 196).
- 39 Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Collected Commentaries on the Mencius* (*Mengzi jizhu* 孟子集注), “Jinxin A” 盡心章句上.
- 40 (Zhu 1986) juan 9, “Xue san” 學三, “Lun zhixing” 論知行.
- 41 (Zhu 1986) juan 11, “Xue wu” 學五, “Dushu fa xia” 讀書法下, p. 178: “讀書閒暇, 且靜坐, 教他心平氣定, 見得道理漸次分曉。季札錄云: ‘庶幾心平氣和, 可以思索義理。’” “When there is spare time from reading, one should sit quietly, so as to make the mind peaceful and the vital force settled; then the principles one apprehends will gradually become clear. The *Jizha lu* says: ‘Perhaps only when the mind is peaceful and the vital force harmonious can one ponder moral principle.’”
- 42 François Noël was not the first to put together Aristotelian and Confucian anthropologies. See (Canaris 2025).
- 43 (Noël 1711, III, 4, p. 102). Original in Latin. Translation to be published in an edited volume by (Canaris et al., Forthcoming).
- 44 On this point, see (Gardner 1998).

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