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The Humaneness and Divine Love: *Confucius* and *Augustine* on the Ethics of Morality

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Abstract
This paper explores the moral and ethical foundations of society as articulated by Confucius and Saint Augustine, focusing on the concepts of Ren (humaneness) in Confucian thought and friendship in Augustine's Christian philosophy. Both thinkers emphasize the importance of virtue, compassion, and interpersonal relationships as essential elements for building a harmonious and morally grounded society. Confucius's idea of Ren advocates for benevolence, mutual respect, and empathy, which form the basis for social harmony and personal responsibility.
In contrast, Augustine's concept of friendship is deeply intertwined with divine love, proposing that true friendship emerges from a shared devotion to God and a commitment to selfless love for others. This paper analyzes the ways in which both Confucius and Augustine link personal virtue to the well-being of society, highlighting their shared belief that moral society arises when individuals prioritize the good of others and cultivate relationships rooted in compassion and selflessness. By comparing their views on humaneness and divine love, this study reveals how both traditions provide timeless moral guidance for creating a more just and virtuous society.

Keywords: Compassion, Divine Love, Friendship, Morality, Humaneness, Righteousness

Introduction

An individual cannot achieve true morality within the society without following its established laws. The discussion of morality, includes the importance of society and how a human person governs society (see Kim, 2019.p.46) [17]. To become a leader is not an easy task of the individual because he needs to lower his ego and put a law that subsides the nature of the person. All human beings should be treated as equals, and there should be love among every one of them, because this is one of the ultimate meaning of *Ren* in Confucius's teachings on morality in society (see Djuth, 1999) [8]. To govern the nation, a leader should act according to its nature and he should put a law that is necessary to the nation. This law according to Confucius should be interconnected to the divine nature of *Ren* because treating equally in the society is the main subject of *Ren* (see Ames, 1998) [1]. In this paper, I want to interpret *Confucius's* concept of *Ren* as love, benevolence, and kindness and *Augustine's* concepts of friendship in a form of Ethical Morality. This interpretative analysis will highlight Augustine's friendship and Confucius's concepts of *Ren* in the society wherein I try also to integrate morality as a main source of *Ren* and *Friendship*.
A morally upright person does not act solely for personal gain, but instead uses their goodness to contribute to the well-being of the entire community. This moral commitment leads to a deeper awareness of others—a kind of expanded empathy or "multi-heartedness," as Chan (1968) puts it. As human beings, we are granted with free will, which allows us to choose our actions and define the direction of our lives (Burt, 1999) [3]. However, with this freedom of a person in the society it comes responsibility. A person is not only responsible for what they do but also for the outcomes of those actions and moral integrity of the choices they act in the society. Thus, even though a human person is endowed with freedom and free will, he is still a responsible member of society, and being responsible in society also means being responsible to others.

Methods

This study employs a comparative textual analysis approach to examine the ethical philosophies of Confucius and Augustine, specifically focusing on the concepts of *Ren* (humaneness) and friendship. The materials used in this research consist primarily

of primary texts, secondary scholarly analyses, and historical commentaries. This study portrays a guide questions on how to discussion the comparative interpretation of this both philosophers. Here are the questions.

1. What does Confucius mean by Ren (humaneness), and how is it central to his ethical philosophy?
2. How does Augustine define friendship, and what role does it play in his moral framework?
3. How are the ideas of Ren and friendship linked to the broader moral goals of society in both Confucianism and Augustine's thought?

To answer this series of questions the researcher puts premises in order to be guided in each question.

Premise 1: The Philosophical inquiry of Ren (humanness) as an ethical manifestation of Philosophy.

Premise 2: The moral framework of Augustine's concept of friendship.

Premise 3: The concept of *Ren in Confucianism* and the ethical theory of *St. Augustine's concept of Friendship.*

Research Method

The study gives a comparative philosophical method**,** which is appropriate for engaging with texts and ideas from different intellectual and cultural traditions. This study employs a qualitative, comparative, and philosophical research design**.** Its central aim is to examine and contrast the ethical foundations of Confucius's concept of *Ren* (humaneness) and Augustine's notion of *Caritas* (divine love) as they relate to the moral life. The research is non-empirical and theoretical in nature, focusing on conceptual analysis rather than statistical measurement or fieldwork.

Philosophical Approach

The study adopts a comparative philosophical method**,** which is appropriate for engaging with texts and ideas from different intellectual and cultural traditions. This method enables a systematic comparison of key ethical themes across Confucian and Augustinian thought, such as:

1. The nature and source of morality

2. The role of virtue and the will

3. The relationship between the self, others, and the transcendent

Hermeneutic Analysis

The research involves a close reading of primary philosophical and theological texts:

1. The Analects by Confucius

2. Confessions, City of God, and On Christian Doctrine by Augustine

Interpretation is informed by a hermeneutic approach, which considers the historical, cultural, and spiritual contexts of each thinker. Attention is given to the original meanings of terms like *Ren* and *Caritas*, and how they inform the broader ethical systems to which they belong.

Results and Discussion

Confucius's concept of Ren as love, and benevolence as the highest identical figure of a Person in the society

Confucius's concept of *Ren* is the most important figure in ruling the society and how it can be governed by the person who becomes a leader and a powerful agent in the society. According to him, do to others what you want to do to you. It is the enunciation of the Golden role: hence, if we want to be respected, then we should respect too (see Chin, 2007) [5]. In the Confucian ethics, politics; and life ideal flows from *Jen* which is the perfect virtue. *Jen* or *Ren* is the cardinal principle of humanism and it expresses the ideal of cultivating human relations, developing human faculties, cultivating one's personality, and upholding human rights.

Ren as love and benevolence is very significant in society. It brings the rights of every person because each of them respects each other and this would bring love and benevolence to society (see Colleran, 1978) [6]. The Ren person is one who, wishing himself to be settled in positions, sets up others; wishing himself to have access to the powerful, achieves access for others. This is the concept of *Ren* for Confucius the people who have in power is the who manifests of his members and he will be one also to give the right position of law to the needy. He will be a communicative person to others as he communicates himself to the law so that he has good access to other persons (see Jung, 2019.p.224) [16]. And this kind of action of a powerful leader leads him to love others and to give benevolence acts of the other persons and this form of society to Confucians political ideas (see Co, 2003) [7]. There should be good treatment for others and they will also love each so that society will be formed into a new dynamic place for the individual. Thus, society can work with love, benevolence, and kindness if all of them act according to the law of Ren which gives meaning to the society according to Confucius's ethical politics. They respect each as what the Golden rule meant for them because respecting each life is the manifestation of love, benevolence, and kindness to each of them (see Fengyan, 2004.p.33) [15]. This is the highest identical figure of a person in society because he is endowed with a complete form of ethics that would lead him to a perfect dimension of morality.

Friendship as moral objective in the Society

Friendship is the state of being attached to another by the respect of affection. It is mainly based and founded on love. Love, here is *casitas* which means a kind of love that seeks the good of the beloved. It also means a love that seeks higher good, which is God (see Augustine 1997) [2]. Friendship can only happen because of man's state of being a social being. It is the "highest expression of a person's social nature." This means to say that human beings can attain their fullness as social beings when they are in a relationship with friends.

A relationship, it seems, cannot be instantaneously considered friendship at the very moment of seeing or knowing each other for the first time. I would say that almost if not all, relationships start with an acquaintance. Each person must be accustomed first to each other before they can have a mutual bond as friends. They must familiarize each other's faces, posture and physique manner of speaking, voice, hobbies, and other aspects of their personality. It does not, therefore, follow that only because man is a social being everybody else is considered to be his friend. There may be a lot of people around a single person but only a few of them can be considered true friends. They might live together but remain indifferent to one another. For example, in a neighborhood in the city, say a subdivision there are a lot of people living together in one compound but still, they may not be mindful of each other. They may not even know each other for several times and may remain a stranger to one another. The same thing can

also happen in orphanages and hospices; they grow together but are not knowledgeable of the people with them. They may even be "closer to their departed loved ones than to the strangers they live within one common house." There would even be times when the person that you would hate the most is the person that you with. This happens because there is no "oneness of heart" (see Augustine 1997) [2].

The Significance and Worth of *Friendship* in the society

In the Book of St. Augustine specially on his Confession he said; Friendship is not simply communicative of two individual beings under a single roof. There is more to it than physical togetherness. Friendship is "having found a mind to one's liking." This does not mean that friends must and should think alike for such doing is not possible because every being is created as an individual with uniqueness and peculiarity. It is the finding of a mind to one liking in the sense that the other understands and accepts the friend just as he is, no matter what. It does not aim to change the friend into something that fits what he wants; it motivates the friend to be better and to improve himself from whatever he is in his present state. A friend is someone that does not seek one's imperfections but is someone who sees his friend as perfect even with that friend's imperfections.

The need to have friends with humans is necessary for the attainment of happiness. Augustine said that to a person "comes the inability to be happy, even in the sense in which one then understood happiness without his friends, however, lavishly might be with carnal luxuries." This is such because man needs company. His nature dictates it. Augustine, throughout his life, was surrounded by friends. He spent every day of his life, from his childhood to his death, with his friends. This enabled him to attain happiness, though temporal, here on earth. I would say that it would be like of experience of heaven and earth to be happy at the side of your friend. An analogy that suits this need for friendship for the attainment of happiness is the act of tickling one's self. If we tickle ourselves so that we would laugh, we would probably fail. For this act of making oneself laugh is probably impossible. A person other than ourselves must do it for us. Only then would we be able to laugh. This means that on our own, our happiness is not guaranteed, but with others, there is greater probability and even certainty. Friends console us in times of lowliness and sorrow (see Augustine 1997) [2]. Augustine grieved with great sorrow the death of his mother, Monica. But with his friends around him, he was able to go on and move on. As Burt expresses it, "he was paralyzed with grief, surviving only because of the Christian community of friends surrounded him." This effect of friendship even goes to the extreme point that we choose to be with our friends than with our family when we are seeking for consolation and advice (see Augustine 1997). Friends, as simple as they are, bring too great an effect on a person that it forces him to move or act in a certain way without exerting pressure and without bearing a feeling of unease (see Augustine 1997) [2]. It is a common experience for a man to doubt some of his actions. It is always a question of to do or not to do, to push through or not to push through. His decisions are all come-and-go he ensures and is not confident of himself with what he is about to do. In such times of indecisiveness, a friend is always a tool for a solution. When one doubts himself, it is his friend who makes him feel and realize his capability and worth. "When you are tempted to fall backward, his idea holds you firm and helps you forward. Even if you fail, as yourself, you know that his love will take on the form of compassion, and will rescue you if rescue is possible and necessary." It is, at most times, a friend who brings joy in the things we do. It is them who give meaning to idle moments. Their company brings great joy to our hearts and soul that we sometimes care not about the things that they do and about the situations that they lead us to. Augustine experienced this feeling during his early life when he robbed a pear tree with his peer.

The Moral Foundation of Friendship

Friendship's value and need had been discussed in the previous pages. In this part, I will try to discuss the virtues of the things upon which friendship is founded (see Augustine 1997) [2]. The first foundation is love. This love is caring for each other. It is called altruistic love. It is an unselfish concern for another. When you have a friend, you must love him for what he is and he must be "loved for his own sake." In loving a friend, you must love the good in him. You must see the perfections that your friends have. This kind of love should value the good in the friend. If a friend would say that he loves the friend but not the good in the friend but rather for the benefits he gains from that friend, it is no anymore altruistic love (Augustine, 1997) [2]. It is utilitarian love. A friendship founded on love is more than bodily aspects but is more spiritual. Thus, friends can remain friends even if they are far from each other for a long period. However, it is in fact that someone is still saddened when a friend goes away to go on a different venture (see Augustine 1997) [2].

According to Augustine, another foundation of friendship is true. Each must know each other's weaknesses and strengths. They must be open and truthful to one another regarding their goals in life. "Their friendship must have some understanding of the reality of the person. (see Robert, 2023) [19]. In friendship, for it to be genuine, both friends involved must be true to themselves and each other. If ever one shows only a fake side of him, their friendship could just be an illusion. At some point, he who is 'fake' could be called a "user-friend." He befriends only those who are useful to him. He makes friends with those from whom he can have benefits. It is during this instance, that after befriending and gaining from that other person, he would just leave him. Therefore, for us to be certain with those whom we call friends, we must be frank and have the courage and strength to confront them and tell them the things about them that bother us. With this, we can able to sift through his identity and reasons for befriending us. However, even if we are frank, we can still be not sure of our friend's sincerity. "The paradox is that we can never be completely sure of the heart of another, but the only way truly to know another is by opening our heart to them as a friend (see Halsted, 1893.p.406) [18]."

Augustine's friendship and Confucius's ideal society as the figurative forms of *Ren*

Augustine's friendship is a dynamic system of the individual to form a good contract with each person in the society. A person who has a friend can easily form a good government in the nation because a good friend will always be a good friend in every situation in society. It is an ethics of friendship that would bring every individual to have a mutual relationship of friendship with each other in society.

Friendship of St. Augustine would be good applicability in society because once an individual is committed to a friend, it will produce love, benevolence, and kindness in society. For Confucius, *Ren* is the ultimate meaning of a person's interest in society because this ren would define as love, benevolence, and kindness (see Feng, 2016.p.147-171) [14]. But before a human person becomes an instrument of love, benevolence and kindness he needs to know first the attitude of each person in society.

Thus St. Augustine and Confucius's concepts are very significant in making society good to produce a harmonious way of living for each person (see Fan, & Li, 2020.p.447) [12]. They will also be treated equally in the society if Friendship and Ren will be applied in the society and this will not be a subject of inequality because each of them knows each other personality. Friendship and Ren is not an immediate thing to happen in society because choosing the right person is not easily attained by the individual. That is why a person should choose wisely in every friend he has in society because to have a friend is to form a unique environment in the community. And this would result in a dynamic form of society because to achieve a good society is to know the environment and attitude of others. Knowing oneself is necessary for society because you cannot choose the right person if you did not know them. It is necessary for Augustine and Confucius's methods on society because ethics is not enough in society the individual should have another dynamic way of achieving a good society.

Conclusion

In exploring and comparing the ethical frameworks of *Confucius* and *Augustine,* this discussion highlights the foundational role of *Ren* (humaneness) and friendship in shaping a morally grounded society. Both Confucius and Augustine provide a compelling vision of how personal virtue can contribute to societal harmony, albeit through different lenses. Confucius with a human-centered, secular approach and Augustine with a theology centered on divine love. Confucius's concept of *Ren* emphasizes the importance of benevolence, mutual respect, and empathy in personal relationships, which in turn fosters social cohesion and harmony. His vision of morality suggests that societal well-being is intricately tied to individuals cultivating virtues such as kindness, respect, and self-discipline. In contrast, Augustine's notion of friendship is rooted in Christian love, where selflessness and the love of God become the foundation for ethical living. For Augustine, friendship is not just a human relationship but a divine bond that guides individuals toward the highest good—the love of God and one another. The research also reveals that both ethical systems underscore the significance of empathy, selflessness, and compassion as essential virtues for a just and ethical society.

Whether through *Ren* or Augustinian friendship, both traditions recognize that true moral development transcends individualistic pursuits and requires a commitment to the welfare of others. By placing these ethical values at the core of social interactions, both Confucius and Augustine offer frameworks that advocate for collective responsibility and mutual care. Furthermore, the impact of religious and secular foundations on moral theory is significant. While Confucius's ethical system operates within a humanistic framework, focused on cultivating virtue through practice and ritual, Augustine's philosophy is deeply rooted in Christian theology, where divine love and grace provide the moral compass for human relationships. These differing foundations offer valuable insights into how moral philosophy can be both a spiritual and a practical guide to building a better society.

Thus, despite the differences in their religious and cultural contexts, the ethical systems of Confucius and Augustine both propose that a morally sound society is achieved when individuals are committed to cultivating virtues that prioritize the well-being of others. Their respective teachings on *Ren* and friendship provide lasting moral frameworks that continue to influence contemporary discussions on virtue, community, and societal ethics.

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