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Xiang Yuan 鄉原: The Appearance-only Hypocrite

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KEYWORDS:

Xiang yuan (village worthies); hypocrisy; pretense; ethical failure; self-knowledge

ABSTRACT

This article seeks to interpret Mencius's criticism of the village worthies (*xiang yuan* 鄉原) and shed light on the distinctive psychological phenomenon that Mencius has captured but has not quite articulated. An attempt at filling out the Mencian view of the village worthies will help us better understand the content of the moral charges made against them and also deepen our analysis of the kind of psychology that early Confucians regard as crucial to moral agency. Following an introduction that overviews Mencius's criticisms of the village worthies, the main discussion of this article is divided into three sections. The first section offers an interpretation of the psychology of the village worthy and articulates the way in which the village worthy can be regarded as a special kind of hypocrite, which I label as an "appearance-only" hypocrite. The second section draws on the proposed interpretation to make sense of Mencius's criticisms of the village worthy. I argue that while the village worthy can elude some common charges against hypocrisy, it is still problematic in the sense that it weakens an unstable system of morality from the inside and inflicts harm on the genuinely virtuous person. The third section delves deeper into analyzing the ethical implications for the self and for others.

INTRODUCTION

The early Confucians strongly criticize a class of people called *xiang yuan* 鄉原, who are village officials, hence the term is often translated as "village worthies". The village worthies tend to be popular in their villages because they appear to be virtuous, conscientious, truthful, and incorruptible in their conduct. Certain remarks made by Confucius and Mencius illuminate something distinctively problematic about the village worthies. Confucius's view of the village worthies is expressed in *Analects* 17.13, where he condemns the village worthies as the "*zei* 賊 of virtue."¹ While *zei* is often translated as "thief", it may also be taken to mean one who inflicts harm on virtue.² Confucius's

¹ For convenience, I use "virtue" and "virtuous person" respectively to refer to the set of ethical qualities and the kind of ethical agent idealized by early Confucians.

² In the *Xunzi*, for example, *zei* is associated with *hai* 害 (harm). *Xunzi* defines *zei* as inflicting harm on or injurious to the good people (*hai liang yue zei* 害良曰賊). The petty person is described as someone who

terse but forceful criticism gives us a glimpse of his annoyance with the village worthies. Wan Zhang, a disciple of Mencius, is puzzled by Confucius's remark and asks Mencius why Confucius regards the village worthies as the *zei* of virtue even though their actions all seem virtuous. Mencius's insightful commentary on the idea of *zei* of virtue in *Mencius* 7B:37 will be the basis for my analyses:

Wan Zhang said, "Their whole village styles those men good and careful. In all their conduct they are so. How was it that Confucius considered them the [*zei*] of virtue?"

Mencius replied, "If you would blame them, you find nothing to allege. If you would criticize them, you have nothing to criticize. They agree with the current customs. They consent with an impure age. Their principles [appear to be] right-heartedness and truth. Their conduct [appears to be] disinterestedness and purity. All men are pleased with them, and they [deem themselves to be right, but that one cannot] proceed with them to the principles of Yao and Shun. On this account they are called 'The [*zei*] of virtue.'"

萬子曰：「一鄉皆稱原人焉，無所往而不為原人，孔子以為德之賊，何哉？」曰：「非非之無舉也，刺之無刺也；同乎流俗，合乎汙世；居之似忠信，行之似廉潔；眾皆悅之，自以為是，而不可與入堯舜之道，故曰德之賊也。」

Mencius further cites an analogy given by Confucius to explain why they are the *zei* of virtue:

Confucius said, "I detest what is specious. I detest the foxtail for fear it should pass for seedlings. I detest flattery for fear it should pass for what is right. I detest glibness for fear it should pass for the truthful...I detest purple for fear it should pass for vermillion.³ I detest the village worthy for fear he should pass for the virtuous."⁴

孔子曰：「惡似而非者：惡莠，恐其亂苗也；惡佞，恐其亂義也；惡利口，恐其亂信也；惡鄭聲，恐其亂樂也；惡紫，恐其亂朱也；惡鄉原，恐其亂德也。」

Another observation Mencius makes is that these village worthies will openly criticize those who hold firm values by saying that since one lives in the world, one

zei, presumably by abandoning what is right in order to preserve what is of one's own interests (*bao li qi yi* 保利棄義) (*Xunzi* 2/13). Understanding *zei* as doing injury to something or someone can help us gain a better sense of Mencius's claim that those who have ethical predispositions (four sprouts) but say of themselves that they are not able to be good is "*zi zei* 自賊" (*Mencius* 2A:6) as in doing injury to oneself rather than to commit theft against one's self. "*Zei*" is also used in a similar sense by Mencius when he says that for a son to reprove his father is the greatest injury a son can do to his father's kindness (*zei en* 賊恩) (*Mencius* 5B:30).

³ Note that the color vermillion is considered as the morally proper color.

⁴ *Mencius* 7B:37, trans., D.C. Lau (modified). I am grateful to the editor for pointing out some problems in my initial translation.

should behave in a manner that pleases the world and takes notice of others' feelings instead of holding onto one's own moral stance in a solitary fashion. Mencius criticizes the village worthies for "trying cringingly to please the world."⁵ Given Mencius's view that everyone has the inborn propensity to be good, it is quite surprising to hear Mencius say that one cannot proceed with the village worthies on the moral path. It is also unusually harsh for Confucius to say that village worthies are the only kind of people he would not regret their passing by and not entering his house.⁶

Four interrelated points about the village worthies can be gleaned from Mencius's remark. First, it is difficult to locate the fault of village worthies.⁷ Second, even though it is difficult to locate their faults, village worthies are still morally blameworthy and are to be regarded as the *zei* of virtue. Third, both Confucius and Mencius seem to think that it is not worthwhile to cultivate a relationship with the village worthies. Fourth, there is something in the eagerness of the village worthies to please their audience that Mencius finds troubling. In the following, I will use these four observations as starting points to make conjectures about the psychology of the village worthy and, on the basis of the proposed interpretation, provide an analysis of what is problematic about being a village worthy. It should be noted at the outset that since Mencius's remark is quite brief, there is room for different interpretations. What I am proposing here is only one possible interpretation that can make sense of the Mencius's comment in 7B:37 in a way that is consistent with his ethical thought in general.

I. Appearance-only Hypocrites

1.1 *Not Having a Mind of His Own*

My proposed understanding of the village worthy's psychology is this: the village worthy is preoccupied with others' opinion of him.⁸ In order to seek the approval of others, they would take on whatever role that they think will please their audience, thereby adjusting their words and actions to conform to the expectations of others in the relevant contexts.⁹ It seems possible that the village worthy may still have stable character traits and beliefs in other contexts where they are not in the eyes of his audience. When I talk about the village worthy not having beliefs here, I only mean their lack of beliefs within a certain scope of moral domain. With whatever qualities they have exhibited to their audience, they would change these displayed qualities in response to the changing expectations of others. One highly plausible explanation for such adaptivity and volatility in changing one's mind and actions is that the village worthy does not have a mind of his own, that is to say, he does not really have the relevant lower-order mental states he ascribes to himself. Metaphorically speaking, he is a chameleon without any true color of his own. It is

⁵ 闕然媚於世也者是鄉原。 *Ibid.*

⁶ 過我門而不入我室我不憾焉者其惟鄉原乎。 *Ibid.* Contrast this remark quoted by Mencius with *Analects* 15.39 where Confucius says that, "In instruction there is no grading into categories" (trans., Lau).

⁷ Throughout this paper, I will use the pronoun "he" for village worthy simply for the reason that only men could hold the positions occupied by village worthies at that time.

⁸ On this point, see Shun 2013 for an insightful discussion of the village worthies.

⁹ I am grateful to Chong Ming Lim and Lucy O'Brien for pressing me address this point.

precisely because he does not have his own beliefs (with regard to things that matter in the context) that he can present himself as anything.

Let me briefly state the technical assumptions I adopt in order to better explain what I mean by the village worthy does not have a mind of his “own”.¹⁰ I assume that there are two levels of mental states, a lower-order state and a higher-order state. A subject’s beliefs, identifications, commitments, emotional responses can occur at both levels. What differentiates the two is that the lower-order mental states arise as a result of the subject’s engagement with the world, whereas the higher-order states arise as a result of the subject’s conscious reading of her lower-order states. The higher-order states and the lower-order states can arise independently and come apart. At the lower-order level, the subject takes the *world* to be a certain way. She might be angry at an unjust ruling, rejoice in a party’s win, etc. All these can arise without the subject’s being propositionally aware that she is so.¹¹ At the higher-order level, she takes *herself* to be taking the world to be a certain way. She believes that she is angry at unjust ruling, she believes that she rejoices in a party’s win etc. My contention is that she can have higher-order mental states without the ascribed lower-order mental states. In a good case, a subject should have a lower-order mental state *s* and ascribe to herself *s*; in a bad case, it is possible that the subject ascribes to herself *s* without having *s* in question. The error is not necessarily due to a broken link between the higher-order state and the lower-order state. It is possible that the subject’s higher-order states are formed without the self-ascribed lower-order states. If this much is granted to me, then the village worthy is someone who has a cluster of higher-order mental states that lack the self-ascribed lower-order states. Hence, when the village worthy avows that *p*, he cannot be accused for harbouring any views inconsistent with *p* because he does not in fact have a view about *p*. For example, when the village worthy says that he adheres to certain ritual practices, one cannot expose his deep-down inconsistent views about these ritual practices because he does not have any. It is in this sense that the village worthy does not have any concrete faults that can be unveiled.

I also assume that all that one can access is one’s higher-order conscious states and therefore, a sincere report from any subject is a report of her higher-order mental states. This implies that the village worthy does not know that he himself is a village worthy. If we take sincerity to simply mean saying what one genuinely believes, then the village worthy can be sincere in his avowals. On my account, the village worthy believes that he believes that *p* (*BBp*) but lacks the lower-order belief that *p* (*~Bp*¹²). If the village worthy declares that he has *Bp*, he is not being insincere because he does have *BBp* and he can only access to this higher-order belief.¹³ As long as the village worthy believes that he believes that *p*, then he is sincere in

¹⁰ A defense of these technical assumptions requires a separate account of self-ascription of belief, which falls outside the scope of this paper.

¹¹ It is another question as to whether she should feel the way she feels, but the presence of lower-order mental states is an indication that she is responsive to the way the world is.

¹² Assuming *~Bp* is different from *B~p*.

¹³ One may doubt whether this counts as sincerity in a substantive sense. I am sympathetic to the thought that this kind of sincerity is a trivial or superficial one. My point here is simply that the village worthy is not necessarily trying to deceive his audience. The audience is still misled nonetheless because it is normally assumed if someone sincerely says “I believe that *p*” (*BBp*), then we take her to believe that *p* (*Bp*).

avowing that he believes that *p*, even though he does not believe that *p*. This also helps explain why Mencius's worry has little to do with whether or not the village worthy is lying. Rather, he seems to be more worried about the village worthy's lacking the sort of attitudes or views that he claims he has.

1.2 Hypocrisy and Appearance-only Hypocrisy

In English-language scholarship, these village worthies are often discussed as hypocrites.¹⁴ As will be explained shortly, there are reasons to think that the psychology of a village worthy falls under the broad psychological phenomenon of hypocrisy;¹⁵ yet, there are also crucial differences that distinguish the village worthies from the conventional types of hypocrites that we often find in everyday platitudes, literary works, or art. In light of the above characterization, we can give a more fine-grained picture of what kind of hypocrite the village worthy is.

Let us first consider the way in which the village worthy can be considered as a kind of hypocrite. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "hypocrisy" as "the assuming of a false appearance of virtue or goodness, with dissimulation of real character or inclinations, esp. in respect of religious life and beliefs." The definition stipulates the presence of dissimulation, implying that the hypocrites do have their own character and inclinations, albeit concealed. On Eva Feder Kittay's account, one that has been extensively discussed in scholarship on hypocrisy, hypocrisy "is a form of deception" (Kittay 1982: 277). If we follow these definitions of hypocrisy, it would be natural to think that a hypocrite is someone who deceives. However, when it comes to the definition of "hypocrite," the focus usually shifts to pretense rather than deception. The *OED* defines a hypocrite as "one who falsely professes to be virtuously or religiously inclined; one who pretends to have feelings or beliefs of a higher order than his real ones." Similarly, Kittay defines a hypocrite as "one who pretends to be better than she is, given a norm or set of expectations within a domain in which sincerity really matters" (Kittay 1982: 277). An implicit assumption here seems to be that deception and pretense are equivalent in the case of hypocrisy.

However, even though deception and pretense often coincide, the concepts of deception and pretense are structurally independent of each other. There are many forms of deception that do not involve pretense. One can, for example, carefully frame her words in such a way that she intentionally deceives others into believing not-*p* without pretending to any beliefs or traits that she does not have. There are also many forms of pretense that does not involve deception. A child playing make-believe can pretend that she is a chef without trying to deceive those around her to think that she really is a chef. A crucial difference between deception and pretense is that the concept of deception requires an awareness of the inconsistency between what the deceiver believes, and what the deceiver conveys to her audience. But such an inconsistency is not necessarily present in pretense. Someone who pretends to be a certain way is not necessarily aware of an inconsistency between what she believes and what she tries to get her audience to believe, e.g. a child pretending to be a chef. What characterizes pretense is one's playing

¹⁴ See, for example, Ames 1996: 236-7, Angle 2013: 182-3, Kim 2014: 257. Note that Angle seems to suggest that *xiang yuan* as it is construed in the *Analecets* are closer to hypocrites than it is in the *Mencius*.

¹⁵ My discussion of hypocrisy here may exclude certain colloquial usages of the term "hypocritical."

a role that she does not in fact hold. The pretender does not need to hold the belief that she is in fact not what she appears to be in order to count as pretending. Hence, it is conceptually possible for pretense, but not deception, to exist independently of an audience.

Now that we have seen how deception and pretense can be independent, the question is then whether both deception and pretense have to be present in hypocrisy. As we have seen before, Kittay's account of hypocrisy takes for granted that the hypocrites intend to deceive. It is certainly the case that in everyday examples of hypocrisy,¹⁶ there is an element of deception present. However, as some scholars have already noted, it is not necessary for deception to be present in hypocrisy. Some kinds of hypocrites do not intend to deceive, such as politicians who criticize their opponents for practices they themselves have adopted without believing that their audience will take their words seriously (Wallace 2010: 313-5) and the complacent hypocrites who, in Crisp and Cowton's words, perform moral duties like "household chores" without taking them seriously (Crisp and Cowton 1994: 345). Some hypocrites might know very well that their audience would not believe them but feign an image anyway because, in certain contexts, it is the posturing itself that would help them achieve what they want. A seasoned politician, for example, might know very well that her audience will not believe what she says, given her track record of hypocrisy; but as part of the campaign strategy, she would still need to posture because that is part of the game of campaign politics. The absence of intent to deceive does not make her less a hypocrite though, if she continues to say one thing and do another. Furthermore, it is conceivable that, in certain cases of hypocrisy, the audience is not deceived. We can imagine the presence of hypocrisy in a cynical society where no one trusts anyone. The hypocrite in this kind of society might well continue to profess values and principles but their cynical audience will not believe the hypocrites. Although the hypocrite is unsuccessful in deceiving in such a cynical community, the charge of hypocrisy can still be laid against her. These altogether suggest that deception is not necessarily involved in hypocrisy.

Let us turn to pretense. Since I have already shown that deception and pretense can be independent of each other, I will only be concerned with the kind of pretense that does not involve deception, that is, presenting oneself in a way that she is in fact not. It seems difficult to imagine a hypocrite who does not to some extent present herself in a way that she is in fact not. Even for borderline cases like a tired parent who appears to be interested in playing games with her daughter,¹⁷ there is still an element of pretense involved. Indeed, the Greek origins of the word "hypocrisy" have meaning along the line that says "to act a part" or "to perform the role."¹⁸ This further reinforces the point that the psychological phenomenon of hypocrisy, construed very broadly, is one that is characterized by the hypocrite's appearing in a way that she in fact is not.

Nonetheless, we do not regard actors or a child who plays "make-believe" games as hypocrites. There must be something else that makes pretense in hypocrisy problematic. What differentiates the hypocrite from someone who merely plays a role then? As Gabriele Taylor insightfully points out, "the hypocrite pretends to live by

¹⁶ These "everyday" examples are those that I label as "inner-outer inconsistent hypocrites" in the following.

¹⁷ See Turner 1990: 264 for discussion of borderline examples of hypocrisy.

¹⁸ Cf. Szabados and Soifer 2004: 19-20.

certain standards when in fact he does not” (Taylor 1981: 144-45). This tells us that the hypocrite does not only play a role, but the role has to accord with certain standards. This relates to another keen observation made by Christine McKinnon, who says that: “the hypocrite, then, is one whose actions are designed to influence for the better the moral judgements of her audience” (McKinnon, 1991: 323). This further suggests that the hypocrite does not only pretend to uphold certain standards, the standards that she pretends to uphold should somehow reflect well on her. McKinnon thinks that the standards the hypocrite pretends to hold are moral standards. Similarly, Kittay’s definition also suggests that the hypocrite pretends to hold moral standards or beliefs that contradict her real standards and beliefs. I think we have to be more careful with what it means to be “better than one is”, for there are possible cases where one for various reasons presents herself in a way that is morally worse than she really is (Crisp and Cowton 1994: 344).¹⁹ We may also consider the hypothetical case of a teenager John, who has always been diligent and disciplined at school, and finds it difficult to make friends after being transferred to a new school. He realizes that he has to behave in a defiant way in order to be accepted by his peers. It seems that his friends can still accuse John of being hypocritical if they find out that John secretly studies diligently at home. The general idea here seems to be that a hypocrite always presents herself in a way that intends to appeal to her audience. A child who pretends to be a chef is presumably just enjoying the game of make-believe without having the further intent to have her audience find her attractive. Hence, even though the hypocrite does not necessarily intend to deceive in pretending to certain standards that appeal to her audience, she is still different from other more innocent forms of pretense in the sense that the hypocrite has the intent to have her audience think well of her.

What we have arrived at now is a minimal form of hypocrisy that has the following characteristics: first, it necessarily involves pretense such that the hypocrite appears in a way that she is not. Second, the hypocrite feigns an image that is deemed attractive by her audience. Third, the hypocrite intends to have her audience think well of her. According to this characterization, a hypocrite does not need to have any “deep down” beliefs or qualities that are inconsistent with the image that she projects. She can simply be someone who pretends to be someone she is not, with the intent to gain her audience’s approval. For instance, a hypocritical right-wing politician does not necessarily harbor political values that are inconsistent with right-wing values. It is possible that she does not have any political views at all and still be a hypocrite. If one accepts the above characterization of the broad phenomenon of hypocrisy, then it becomes quite obvious that the village worthy fits the bill. The village worthy pretends to be the kind of person the villagers like and he uses the villagers’ approval to serve his self-interest. By self-interest, I mean whatever the village worthy deems beneficial to herself. It is another issue as to whether something is indeed beneficial to the village worthy. The point here is that the village worthy’s attention is on himself and is concerned with advancing his own interest.

We do not have to suppose that the hypocrite is aware that she is using others’ approval to serve her own interests. It is one thing for a subject to be motivated by a concern for self-interest; it is another thing to be aware of being so motivated in higher-

¹⁹ Crisp and Cowton offered the example of a teenager who pretends allegiance to the gangsters in his neighborhood to gain acceptance.

order way. If the hypocrite has a concern for self-interest and when the desire is coupled with a grasp that gaining others' approval is an effective way of advancing self-interest in her context²⁰ and a grasp of the audience's preferences, she will adjust himself in a way that aims at gaining the audience's approval.

The village worthy is a hypocrite, but of a peculiar type, which I label as "appearance-only" hypocrisy. A distinction can be made between "inner-outer inconsistent" kind of hypocrisy and the "appearance-only" kind of hypocrisy. Hypocrites of the "inner-outer inconsistent" type are those standard examples that come to mind. For example, if we are to think of some hypocrites in literature, we will probably think of Iago, Tartuffe, and Uriah Heep. These hypocrites put up a façade to conceal certain true motives, feelings, or intentions that are inconsistent with the image they present. The "inner-outer inconsistent" type of hypocrite would present herself as holding moral value y when she in fact holds x , where x is inconsistent with y . By contrast, the "appearance-only" hypocrite presents herself as holding y when she in fact lacks y . There need not be any "real" qualities that are inconsistent with the image that the village worthy presents.²¹ The idea of "unmasking" hypocrisy is not applicable to the appearance-only hypocrite because the idea of a mask presupposes that there is something real underneath.²² An imagistic way of depicting the difference is that while those inner-outer inconsistent hypocrites are usually morally righteous outside but morally wicked inside, the appearance-only hypocrites appear righteous outside but hollow inside. One may unmask Tartuffe and expose his profane side; but there is nothing that we can expose when it comes to the appearance-only hypocrite because there is not a real side to be exposed. In this regard, the appearance-only hypocrite can also elude the common charge of insincerity against inner-outer inconsistent hypocrites.²³ The inner-outer inconsistent hypocrite may sincerely believe that she is the kind of person she pretends to be while lacking the relevant qualities or beliefs in question.²⁴ Along a similar line, the appearance-only hypocrite also avoids the charge of deception, for she herself sincerely believes that she believes that p while lacking the relevant qualities or beliefs in question. The difference is that the inner-outer inconsistent hypocrite has a contrary belief with regard to p , whereas the appearance-only hypocrite does not have a belief with regard to p .

1.3 A Distinctive Psychological Phenomenon

²⁰ The kind of environment in which a village worthy thrives is likely to be one that has clear standards of moral appraisal. The clear standards will make it easy for the village worthy to grasp what please his audience and what kind of image he is to project.

²¹ See the previous section for discussion of what I mean by qualities that can be considered as one's own.

²² This is consistent with Mencius's complaint that "If you would blame them, you find nothing to allege. If you would criticize them, you have nothing to criticize" (*Mencius* 7B:37).

²³ Tuner has also pointed out that the wrongness of hypocrisy is not found in insincerity (Turner 1990). However, Turner's own disparity model is also inapplicable to the case of appearance-only hypocrisy.

²⁴ This captures the intuition that some hypocrites are sincere in their beliefs. See, for example, Lynch and Fisher (2012) for a discussion of what they call "pure hypocrisy". My proposed appearance-only hypocrisy differs significantly from the pure hypocrisy in the sense that they appearance-only hypocrites do not have their own (lower-order) beliefs and commitments. This does not affect Lynch and Fisher's claim that pure hypocrites also exist.

The village worthy might resemble the following groups to some extent: (1) the “victim hypocrite” who endorses conventional norms in order to protect herself or effect changes in the long run under an oppressive group.²⁵ (2) The weak-willed person who acts in a way that is inconsistent with her professed beliefs or standards.²⁶ (3) The socially compliant who unthinkingly accepts received norms and tries to fit in the social group. The village worthy differs from the above in two important ways. One important difference is that the victim hypocrite, the weak-willed, and socially compliant all have their beliefs and identifications that can be called their own: the victim hypocrite conceals her own beliefs; the weak-willed fails to be motivated by her beliefs; the socially compliant person forms her beliefs in an epistemologically irresponsible way. The village worthy, however, does not have his own beliefs. (3) might closely resemble the village worthies in real life but conceptually, the main difference between the socially compliant and hypocrites is that the former does not have standards of their own but the latter does not. Another major difference lies in motivation. The village worthy seeks others’ approval so that he can further his selfish interests. The victim hypocrite, however, is not trying to actively advancing her self-interest but only negatively avoiding harm. The weak-willed identifies with a set of standards that are accepted by her audience but somehow fails to act in accord with the standards she upholds. The motivation of the socially compliant person can be construed in various ways. But even if one argues that the socially compliant may just have the same motivation for gaining audience’s approval just like the hypocrite, it still is the case that the socially compliant identifies with others’ beliefs and internalizes them to be her own beliefs.

The village worthy, as an appearance-only hypocrite, is also different from the self-deluded or self-deceived even though both have mistaken higher-order mental states about lower-order states.²⁷ The former does not have the lower-order psychological state that she pretends to have but the latter does. As a shorthand, let *s* be any psychological state that the village worthy pretends to have with regard to subject matter *p*. In the case of self-deception, the subject has the desire to have *s* but has an initial state that is inconsistent with *s*. A self-deceived politician might want to believe that accepting bribes is wrong but deep down believes that accepting bribes is acceptable. What is significant about this difference is that the self-deceived at least have some psychological relation to the way the world is with regard to *p*. By contrast, the village worthy does not have any psychological relation to the way with regard to *p*. Since there is no part of the hypocrite that has a view on *p*, there is no issue of one part of the self, which believes *p*, that

²⁵ See Kittay 1985 and McKinnon 1991 for further discussions of these types of hypocrisy.

²⁶ See Piers Benn 1993: 225-6 for discussion of the differences between a weak-willed person and the standard hypocrites. See also Taylor 1985.

²⁷ Some philosophers treat self-delusion and self-deception as synonymous (e.g. Holton 2001) while others make a more fine-grained differentiation between the two. Eric Funkhouser (2005), for example, takes self-delusion to be the state in which the subject comes to believe what they want to believe, whereas self-deception is the state in which the subject wants to believe *p* but still believes not-*p*. Whether there is a distinction between self-delusion and self-deception, it does not undermine the present point about how the appearance-only hypocrite does not fit in either category.

actively tries to get another part of the self into believing p .²⁸ The village worthy is simply not engaged with the world with regard to p . Hence, although the village worthy is mistaken in holding BBp , he is neither mistaken about her own beliefs nor is there deception by the self (e.g. Mele 1997), nor deception about the self (e.g. Holton 2001). He is simply wrong in the sense that the self-ascribed lower-order states are absent. Perhaps “self-ignorance” is a better term that captures this failure of self-knowledge.²⁹ Such a failure must be quite systematic because in order to pretend to be certain type of person, he must have a cluster of false higher-order views about his lower-order mental states.

It should be emphasized that the aim of this article is not to establish a new kind of hypocrisy and the key issue here is not a terminological one about whether or not “hypocrite” is the right word to categorize the village worthy. If one accepts that the village worthy is a kind of appearance-only hypocrite, the following discussion will also shed light on our understanding of the phenomenon of hypocrisy and contribute to discussion of problems with hypocrisy. If one does not accept the claim that the village worthy is a hypocrite, the description of the village worthy’s psychological state will still contribute to our understanding of the ethical implications of such a psychological state.

II. *Zei of Virtue*

2.1 *Threat to the Moral System*

So far, we have established that the village worthy is an appearance-only hypocrite. Since he does not in fact have the qualities that he pretends to have, we cannot find faults with them. But what is so problematic with not having qualities of his own if he is acting in the morally acceptable way? In the section, I will try to offer an interpretation of Mencius’s criticism of the village worthy based on the account proposed in section I.

If we think that the presence of moral criticism is an essential characteristic of moral community, then it is precisely in this area that the village worthy endangers a moral community. The kind of threat the village worthy poses to a moral system is different from the kind of threat posed by inner-out inconsistent hypocrites. McKinnon helpfully points out that hypocrites subvert morality – they are like parasites of the moral system, and they stand in the way of morally urgent actions.³⁰ I think McKinnon’s point is applicable to the inner-outer hypocrites but not to the appearance-only hypocrites. In a

²⁸ This is why the problem of whether partitioning of the self is possible does not arise for the case of the village worthy. I am grateful to John Hyman for his helpful comments on this section

²⁹ What remains unclear at this point is the kind of mechanism at work such that one can “get” herself into a state that she believes that she believes something without believing it. For whatever mechanism it is, it does not undermine the point that the appearance-only hypocrite’s state of self-ignorance is a kind of failure of self-knowledge motivated by his own desire to seek self-interest.

³⁰ Following McKinnon 1991: 324, I also take “morally urgent action” to mean what pertains to “aspects of society which were taken seriously: religion and morality.” This differs from action that is of a “trivial nature” such as a polite remark that compliments a friend’s outfit motivated by a concern not to hurt her feelings. That said, I am aware that it leaves open the question what is and what is not of “trivial” nature.

morally urgent situation, the inner-outer hypocrite's own beliefs might dominate and prevent him to act. This is probably what McKinnon means by the inner-outer stands in the way of morality. The difference between the inner-outer hypocrites and the village worthy is that although the inner-outer hypocrite might fail to act in a way that is being called for by a morally urgent situation, her failure at least exposes what kind of person she truly is like. Such kind of unmasking, to certain extent, is still meaningful and has the positive value of revealing the truth to the audience. On the contrary, the village worthy sides only with popular opinion. If he thinks the kind of act required in a morally urgent situation is deemed laudable by the general public, he will probably still act.

A problem occurs when there is a divergence between public opinion and what is in fact called for in a morally urgent situation.³¹ As mentioned before, the village worthy can be morphed in different ways depending on the circumstances. He will not pretend to have moral qualities that do not appeal to their audience. Hence, unlike the inner-outer hypocrites, the village worthy does not necessarily uphold moral standards or act in a moral way. From a third person perspective or from the genuinely moral person's point of view, it is clear that the village worthy fails to act in morally urgent cases; however, to her audience, the village worthy has not failed if her audience themselves do not uphold these standards. Hence, the village worthy does not need a *moral* community.³² He only needs some sort of community that judges certain kinds of character as attractive. What this implies is that, the village worthy will never fail a moral test from the perspective of his current audience. Although a small group of genuinely virtuous people might be able to detect the village worthy's hypocrisy, they will not be able to convince the village worthy's audience that these seemingly gracious and attractive people are not what they appear.³³ Conceptually, the unmasking of hypocrisy can be realized in counterfactual situations. In real life, perhaps it is only when the village worthy is transferred to another context that upholds values that are contrary to his former context that his previous audience might come to realize that he is an appearance-only hypocrite, though these previous audience are not his current audience anymore.

Mencius's concern is probably that even though the village worthy does not necessarily fail to act in a way that pleases his audience, he still stands in the way in the morally urgent cases because he propagates the public's confused moral judgments.³⁴ Suppose it is morally wrong for officials to accept bribes but the majority or dominant group of the community thinks that it is acceptable. In this case, the village worthy may take bribes without causing his audience to think that he is immoral. And in attempt to protect himself from possible criticism by the group of people who defend moral values, he might in turn criticize the morally upright for being too stringent and impractical in practice. As Mencius's comment in 7B:37 tells us, the village worthies will mock those who firmly hold moral values for being too stringent and not knowing how to engage with people. Such kind of mocking or criticisms of the morally upright will further reinforce the majority's misguided thinking on moral issues. Just like the color purple, which closely resembles vermillion, easily confuses people and misleads them to think

³¹ An assumption here is that there is in fact a morally right way to act in the morally urgent situation.

³² See McKinnon 1991 for an elaborate discussion of what I take to be the inner-outer inconsistent hypocrites' dependence on a moral community.

³³ I am indebted to Kwong-loi Shun for helping me think through this point.

³⁴ I am grateful for the editor's editorial comments, which press me to make this point clearer.

that it is the morally proper choice, the village worthy, who to the audience is attractive, easily confuses his audience and misleads the audience to think that he has the more attractive character than the genuinely virtuous people. In this way, the village worthy weakens the system of morality internally, rather than subverting it externally.³⁵ The latter occurs when the system itself is intact but lacks support or fails to withstand challenging forces against it; the former occurs when there are clashing views within the system. Since it is usually in an unstable moral system that the general public is in the process of working out their views on moral issues, the pretense of village worthies who perpetuate confusions over moral issues only accelerates the collapse of an already unstable moral system.

2.2 Threat to the Genuinely Virtuous

I suggested in the above example that the village worthy might even criticize the morally upright people for being too stringent and antisocial. This has further ethical implications for those who are actually committed to living up to moral standards (for convenience, I will refer to them as the “genuinely virtuous”). It is worth noting that in existing literature, discussions of the badness of hypocrisy tend to focus on the harm the hypocrite does to herself or to her audience, but rarely focus on the harm that the hypocrite does to those who are genuinely good. My suggestion here is that Mencius is also worried about the harm the village worthy inflicts on the genuinely virtuous people. As in the case of the “inner-outer inconsistent” hypocrites, the village worthy might also imitate the qualities of the virtuous people for self-serving purposes that have nothing to do with morality. This kind of hypocrisy is bad not only because the hypocrites are being credited for qualities they do not deserve; more problematically, the virtuous qualities are plagiarized from those who are entitled to these qualities, to serve a purpose that is against the nature of these qualities. We may figuratively speak of the hypocrite a thief of virtue who free rides on the virtues of the genuinely good people for self-serving purposes.

Even if the village worthy does not feign the qualities of the truly virtuous people, the village worthy is still a source of harm to the genuinely virtuous people because, in instances where the genuinely virtuous people are the minority, the village worthy distracts the general public from recognizing and crediting the genuinely virtuous with the praise they deserve. More seriously, since the village worthy weakens the moral system, he is corroding the kind of moral system that the genuinely virtuous people are committed to build and preserve. Hence, even if the genuinely virtuous people themselves are not bothered by the village worthy’s stealing their qualities, the village worthy is still a threat to them because the village worthy has the potential of damaging the moral system that the virtuous people are committed to build. In light of the above discussions, we may take the expression “*zei* of virtue” to have two senses: the harm he poses to the system of morality and the harm he poses to the genuinely virtuous people.

III. Impediment to Ethical Cultivation

³⁵ The point that hypocrisy subverts system of morality is raised in McKinnon 1991. I further elaborate on this idea and draw a distinction between subverting the moral system externally and internally.

3.1 *Ethical Implications for Others*

Confucius is quoted by Mencius as saying that he will not regret if the village worthy passes by his house without entering, which suggests that Confucius is not interested in getting acquainted with the village worthy. My speculation is that Confucius's avoiding the village worthy is more than an expression of his disapproval of the village worthy. Additionally, Confucius's disinterest in being acquainted with the village worthy has to do with an underlying assumption that the village worthy is unable to engage in meaningful personal relationships. Here, I only mean relationships in which moral dimension is salient.³⁶ In the cases of inner-outer inconsistent hypocrisy, the hypocrite still has his own view on her audience. Let's call this hypocrite H and her audience A. H might secretly believe A's favorite poem is poorly written but nevertheless pretends to admire the poem in order to get A's approval. However, there is a possibility that A will be able to unmask H's hypocrisy. Perhaps A happens to overhear H murmuring to herself that A has a bad taste in poetry. Such kind of relationship is of course defective because A was being kept from the truth. However, the possibility of unmasking also implies a possibility for a substantial relationship to be established between A and H. When A gets to hear what H really thinks of the poem, it is up to A to decide whether she wants to continue the relationship with H. If Confucius were A, he probably would not mind H walking into his house. Confucius could explain to H why he thinks the poem is well-written, or listen to H's thoughts on why H thinks that the poem is bad. The possibility of unmasking also implies the possibility for Confucius to really get to know H and hence presents Confucius with a genuine choice of whether he wants to be acquainted with H. In the case of village worthy, since there is not even the possibility of unmasking, there is also no possibility of really getting to know the village worthy. Since the village worthy does not have his own character, there is no ground to even begin a substantial relationship with him. A will never get to see the genuine side of the village worthy, for there is not a real side (in the relevant domain) to the village worthy; therefore, A will never have the genuine option of deciding whether or not the village worthy is someone she wants to befriend. There is nothing underneath, so to speak, that the village worthy's audience can latch onto to establish some sort of bond with the village worthy.

One might argue that Confucius's standard is too high. It is conceivable that some might prefer their acquaintances to continue the pretense. They might not care if the words or actions of their acquaintances are genuinely theirs as long as their interactions promote their self-esteem and enhance their public image.³⁷ The audience might prefer to interact with others in a superficial way that promotes or preserves their public image and self-esteem. As an audience, she might react to the village worthy in such a way that encourages his hypocritical behavior or leads on the latter to think that her pretense is successful. This pleases the hypocrite so that she can in turn further the pretense to fuel her acquaintance's need for recognition. What is problematic to be acquainted with a village worthy then if both sides are happy?

³⁶ I am grateful to Chong Ming Lim for helping me improve this example.

³⁷ As Bob Seger's lyrics, quoted by Szabados and Soifer, says: "I used her, she used me, but neither one cared. We are getting our share" (Szabados and Soifer 2004:126).

I suspect the early Confucians' answer will be that such a relationship is damaging to ethical cultivation because of the absence of moral address. In a relationship between two "inner-outer inconsistent" hypocrites, we can imagine that there is at least some form of moral address present.³⁸ One side might criticize the other for failing certain moral standards, albeit hypocritically.³⁹ The presence of overt moral opprobrium at least serves as an opportunity that prompts the other hypocrite to reflect upon herself. However, when talking to the village worthy, all he does is to pretend to agree with the audience even when the audience herself has failed some moral standards. Since none of them has values or beliefs of their own, their interaction is bound to be superficial and have minimal content. When the audience puts forth an idea, the village worthy will suggestively test whether it is something that will please her. If it is, the village worthy will endorse the idea. Even if the audience has not invested much trust and commitment into the relationship in the first place, the audience is still deprived because what the village worthy will do is just to endorse her. In this way, she is being hindered from getting an honest advice on what could have helped her improve or correct herself.⁴⁰

3.2 *Ethical Implications for the Self*

The village worthy does not only deprive others a chance to self-improve, he also denies himself the possibility to possess integrity. The notion of integrity is a philosophically complex one. Here, I can only draw on what other philosophers have to say about integrity in order to explain why I think the village worthy lacks integrity. According to Taylor, a person of integrity is someone who preserves her identity, who is capable of evaluating different courses of action, who does not repeatedly act against her evaluations, and whose identity is not threatened by mutually undermining identifications (Taylor 1981:109-123). Taylor also puts much emphasis on the preservation of identity in characterizing integrity. Taylor construes the notion "identity" in terms of "what identifies the person as essentially the person he is" or "what is truly hers" (Taylor 1981:109). On this account of integrity, it is not obvious that inner-outer inconsistent hypocrites must lack integrity, for the inner-outer inconsistent hypocrites can have a set of consistent identifications that are truly theirs. The village worthy, by contrast, must lack integrity, not because there is a "break between motive and action," which is commonly taken as a mark of one's lack of integrity, but because he does not have "what is truly"⁴¹ his. Although he professes his beliefs and values, he does not identify with any of them. Since he does not have any identifications of his own, he is not even in a position to have mutually undermining identifications. It is not that his integrity is

³⁸ This is not to deny that hypocritical moral address is problematic in its way. As Wallace insightfully points out, hypocrisy denies the equal moral standing of persons (Wallace 2010).

³⁹ An often-cited example is Senator Joseph McCarthy, who expelled male homosexuals from the government when he was himself a homosexual (Cf. Kittay 1982: 289).

⁴⁰ This echoes the Confucian emphasis on *zhong* 忠, which I argue in a separate paper that it is a notion about giving one's honest opinion about what is in fact good or morally right for others to do without reference to one's self-interest.

⁴¹ See Crisp and Cowton 1994: 346 for discussion of how the standard Tartuffe-like hypocrites will meet the conditions specified by Taylor. The phrase "break between motive and action" is used by Taylor in her account of hypocrisy (Taylor 1985: 123).

corrupted; rather, it is his lack of identifications that prevents him from being in a condition to possess integrity.⁴²

More problematically, what drives this quest for approval is not even a commitment to building a moral character. This is different from the kind of hypocrite who wants to be moral or is committed to morality but might have misunderstood the nature of morality or failed to follow through in actions. The village worthy is not even committed to self-improvement and moral values. The object of his attention is devoid of ethical concern and is focused solely on self-interest. He is also not committed to gaining others' approval in itself.⁴³ External approval is only derivatively good for the village worthy insofar as the village worthy takes external approval to be advancing his own interest in some way. His attention is on himself rather than what others think. Except his self-interest, there is nothing that he will not seek; there is also nothing that he must seek. This is probably why Mencius thinks that one cannot even proceed with the village worthies on the moral path because, in Mencius's view, a necessary condition for being moral is that the agent recognizes that there are just certain things an ethical agent will not do in spite of the fact that it advances her self-interest.⁴⁴ I shall forestall the claim that being village worthy itself is his identification because being motivated to seek self-interest cannot count as his commitment. As McFall succinctly puts it:

A person of integrity is willing to bear the consequences of her convictions, even when this is difficult, that is, when the consequences are unpleasant. A person whose only principle is "Seek my own pleasure" is not a candidate for integrity because there is no possibility of conflict—between pleasure and principle—in which integrity could be lost. Where there is no possibility of its loss, integrity cannot exist...A commitment to spinelessness does not vitiate its spinelessness—another of integrity's contraries...Like the pleasure seeker and the approval seeker, he lacks a 'core,' the kind of commitments that give a person character and that make a loss of integrity possible. In order to sell one's soul, one must have something to sell. (McFall 1987: 9-10)

The same point can be made about the village worthy. The very idea of commitment implies that the agent is willing to bear possible losses to self-interest and accepts constraints on what she can or cannot do. A single-minded pursuit of self-interest cannot count as commitment because, by definition, the agent is not willing to bear losses to self-interest but is willing to do anything that furthers her self-interest.

As we have seen, what bothers Mencius is not just the behavior of the village worthy but also the psychological state the village worthy is in. For whatever moral beliefs or commitments he professes, they are only superficially or trivially his because he does not identify with them deep down. In a healthy case, when a subject is trying to

⁴² This concern about the perils to integrity is very different from the consequentialist concern about whether hypocrisy will bring about bad consequences. For discussion on consequentialism and hypocrisy, see William Shaw 1999 and Szabados and Soifer 2004: Chapter 5. See also Turner 1990 and Benn 1993 for views that defend the occasional practice of hypocrisy.

⁴³ It is conceivable that certain people need others' approval for the sake of approval because they have difficulty approving themselves internally. The character Zelig might be an example of this kind of people. in Woody Allen's directed film *Zelig* (1983, produced by Orion Pictures).

⁴⁴ Cf. *Mencius* 6A:10.

decide whether *p* is right, she answers the question whether or not *p* is right. The village worthy, however, answers the question whether or not *she should believe* that *p* is right, for he is so motivated by a concern for self-interest that all his attention is directed at the presentation of the self. In order to preserve the image he wants to project, he constantly thinks along the line, “Am I, the village official, the kind of person who believes that *p*”, instead of “Do I believe that *p*?”⁴⁵ Hence, in reporting his beliefs, the village worthy is not really reporting his view on *p* but merely his view on what he should believe about *p*. Although the avowals are sincere, they are not the meaningful kind of avowals that tell us someone’s moral views and identifications.⁴⁶

A natural consequence of this preoccupation with presentation of being self-motivated by self-interest is his apathy towards others. Although he is eager to find out his audience’s likes and dislikes, he does not have any concern for them in a way that is independent of his own personal gain. He does not care if the villagers’ condition of living is poor or if his neighbor is sick. All he cares about is how he presents himself in response to their expectations. It is also possible that he has affective responses to his audience, even intense ones; but his affective responses are also self-directed. The village worthy might feel angry about an unjust court ruling but the object of his anger is not a direct response to the court ruling itself, but is brought about via a conception of what kind of image he wants to project. Like an actor who can get themselves into certain emotions via some other thoughts, the village worthy can also get himself to have attitudes or feelings via a conception of what kind of image he should project. He is not directly pained by the victim’s pain. It is in this sense that he is apathetic towards others.

A positive lesson about Confucian moral psychology may be drawn from Mencius’s negative portrayal of the village worthy. If Mencius is worried about the village worthy’s superficial moral stance, we have good grounds to think that the ideal psychological state is one in which the subject does not superficially uphold a moral stance. It is not sufficient for the ethical agent to not lie about her moral stance or act in a way that is consistent with moral standards; more importantly, she has to identify with the moral stance, to have her own view about morality.⁴⁷ And an identification with the Confucian moral stance will entail a steadfast commitment to moral standards, in virtue of which the agent self-imposes a constraint on what she will or will not do. Moreover, the ideal ethical agent should be someone who is not apathetic towards others. It is not enough to just have the appropriate affective responses; more importantly, the concern has to be a direct concern for others that is not brought about via a concern for self-interest. The ethical agent has to see others’ projects and well-being, in and of itself, worthy of the importance and concern, so that she is pained by others’ pain and takes pleasure in others’ pleasure.

According to Mencius, “those who cannot live in abode of benevolence *ren* (*ren* 仁) and who cannot follow righteousness (*yi* 義) are abandoning themselves (*ziqu* 自棄)”

⁴⁵See Moran 2001, especially pp. 63-64 for a detailed discussion of the distinction between the questions “whether *p*” and “what am I to believe about *p*”.

⁴⁶Note that this does not mean that the village worthy does not have any views at all. Indeed, the village worthy is someone who actively finds out things about the world and others, for he needs to keep track of his audience’s likes and dislikes and poises himself to respond to changes in the environment; but he is only concerned with how the world and others can serve his self-interest. His attention is on himself rather than the world and others.

⁴⁷Cf. Mencius’s comment that the sages do not act morally but act from morality (4B:19).

(*Mencius* 4A:10). Mencius would probably think that the village worthy is abandoning himself. Since he does not have any deep commitment to moral standards, he cannot live in the abode of *yi*; since he does not have concern for others in a way that is independent of his own interest, he cannot live in the abode of *ren*. The village worthy is so preoccupied with self-interest that he forgoes his predisposed capacities of *ren* and *yi*. He is like those who have ethical predispositions but claim that they are unable to be good. Borrowing Mencius's expression, he plays thief to do injury to his ethical predispositions (*zi zei* 自賊) (*Mencius* 2A:6).

IV. Concluding Remarks

Earlier in this article, I made four observations about Mencius's view on the village worthies. First, it is difficult to locate the fault of village worthies. Second, the village worthies can be considered as the thief/injurer to virtue. Third, it is not worthwhile to have a relationship with village worthies. Fourth, there is something in the eagerness of the village worthies to please his audience that Mencius finds troubling. In light of the above analysis, we can now better understand these four points because (1) village worthies are appearance-only hypocrites who do not have his moral stance and cannot be unmasked; (2) the village worthies do harm to the moral system by confusing people's sense of right and wrong and do harm to the genuine virtuous people by either free-riding on their qualities or wrecking the system they are committed to build; (3) the village worthies do not possess the basic psychological conditions to be engaged in meaningful personal relationships and possess integrity; (4) the village worthies only have superficial moral views and are apathetic towards others because their moral views and affective responses are all filtered through a concern for furthering their self-interest.

Since the issues covered here are quite broad, ranging from an account of the village worthy's psychology, to its ethical implications, to its bearing on our understanding of Confucian idealized psychological state, it is inevitable that I can only sketch the problem and might have only scratched the surface on many of the points. For example, one upshot of the proposed account is that there might be two senses of "self" in Confucian thought, one non-ethical self that focuses on self-interest and one ethical sense of self. It seems that, for the early Confucians, the former is an obstacle to the development of the latter. As the case of the village worthy shows, the more obsessed one is with self-interest, the more the ethical self disintegrates or fails to be developed. It is also unclear if Mencius means that village worthies are irredeemable. The answer to this depends on Mencius's understanding of why moral motivation fails even though we are all endowed with ethical dispositions and also on whether the peculiar psychological state the village worthy occupies is rectifiable. There are also sociological implications to be fleshed out. It is unclear at this point if the village worthy is the sole bearer of blame. As I suggested above, village worthies thrive in a community that has a widely accepted view of what is good and bad, for such kind of community makes it clear to the village worthy what people's standards are and how he may present himself in a way pleasing to his audience.⁴⁸ While these questions cannot be settled here, I hope the present discussion

⁴⁸ Thanks to the editorial comments that help me articulate this point more precisely.

has at least raised interesting questions about early Confucian moral psychology and ethics that can be taken up for further investigations.

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