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Confucius' Embodied Knowledge

Abstract

The main purpose of the present article is to explicitly link the *Analects* to embodiment theory (ET). As indicated in the introduction, embodiment has been an important topic in recent Sinological research, but until now rather few explicit connections have been made with ET. In relation to embodied knowledge, the article discusses the following topics: embodiment, embeddedness, enactment, extendedness, emotivity, implicitness, emergence, joy and apprenticeship or self-cultivation. The same themes are found to be important in the *Analects*, with a plethora of examples. Arguably, ET could thus be a useful paradigm for discussing several important themes of the *Analects*. And with the *Analects* being one of the founding texts of the Chinese philosophical tradition – although similar concerns are found in other texts – it could also be beneficial to further developments in the ET itself, on the condition that its proponents familiarize themselves with the Chinese philosophical tradition where important issues of ET have been explicitly discussed for two and a half millennia.

Keywords: embodiment theory, Confucianism, *Analects*, comparative philosophy, enactivism

Introduction

Several claims similar to the ideas outlined in this article have been made about the Chinese tradition from the 19th century until today. Notably, Chinese thought has been described as “concrete” in contrast to “abstract”, “practical” in contrast to “theoretical”, “aesthetical” in contrast to “scientific” (cf. Hall and Ames 1998; Nakamura 1964; Li 2010; Jung 2011), etc. In this article, I propose Embodiment Theory (ET) as a useful framework for bringing out deeper distinctions which, among others, could give a more precise meaning to the claims of those authors.

ET formed partly as a critique of the previously dominant understanding of knowledge as disembodied, abstract, general, contemplative, explicit, representational, free from emotions and particular contexts, and so on.¹ This is a derived mode of knowledge that can never be completely separated from its embodied context. Interest in different aspects of ET has been widespread in recent decades (for an overview, see Shapiro 2014; Wilson and Foglia 2015; Gallagher and Schmicking 2010, 181–252).

In Sinology, too, there has been a growing interest in embodiment viewed from different angles and concerning its various features in the history of Chinese thought (Emerson 1996; Sivin 1995; Lewis 2006; Jullien 2007; Sommer 2008), medicine (Kuriyama 2002; Hsu 2007), Daoism (Schipper 1978; Despeux 2005; Kohn 2006), the senses (Geaney 2002; Sterckx 2003), emotions (Zhang 2007), and power (Zito and Barlow 1994), to name just a few examples. Some fields, like medicine, inherently involve the body. Moreover, in principle, all overviews of early Confucianism should contain an explanation of the role of rituals, and hence some presentation of embodiment.

Still, in Sinological works there are few explicit connections with contemporary ET, and at the same time the Western scholarship on embodiment has limited references to other traditions, perhaps simply due to the isolation of various curricula.² The aim of the present article is thus to explicitly connect ET with the Chinese tradition.

1 See Nietzsche’s (posthumously and controversially edited) *Will to Power* § 636 (1967, 339–40) and “On the Despisers of the Body” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2006, 22–24) and Merleau-Ponty’s “Phenomenology of Perception” (1945).

2 Although there are, of course, places where they come together. For instance, National Taiwan University Press has a recent book series called “Body and Nature” (身體與自然) that has a volume edited by Shunde Yu (2015), directly concerning questions of embodiment in both traditions.

In what follows, I will briefly describe some aspects of embodied cognition and then move on to a more detailed presentation of the corresponding topics in the *Analects*.

Embodied Knowledge

It has been shown that our knowledge is shaped by the kind of body we have (Shapiro 2014; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Embodiment extends beyond the brain and nervous system and even beyond our skin to other people and the environment. Without the body, it is difficult to conceive how anything could have a meaning or relevance, because meaning is something that stands out from a background: something is selected and paid special attention to, while everything else is left unheeded. Selecting everything is the same as selecting nothing. But who or what selects, if not our bodies, we as embodied agents? From the very beginning, the field of experience is differentiated and we make axiological distinctions because our bodies – and we as embodied and social beings – have positive needs for food, drink, warmth, human company, etc., and negative needs to avoid excessive tactile, chemical, auditory, and visual stimuli, along with human aggression and other harms and irritants.

Cognition and existence in general are embedded in a certain physical, social, cultural, historical context (Damasio 1994, 83–113; Heidegger 1996;³ Dawson 2014; see also Uexküll 1926 and 1957 for a general theory of Umwelt). As we said above, the world we are embedded in is not homogeneous and isotropic, but heterogeneous and anisotropic, i.e. it has distinctions and preferred directions according to our needs and desires. We do not live in an indifferent 3D space, but the space as we experience it opens up from a certain viewpoint; it indicates possible movements and interactions in it; we experience space and things as affording certain actions and inhibiting others. An experienced space is already a meaningful one.

Cognition is also enacted. We do not live in a predefined world that we should somehow just “observe” and take notice of (which would require a special effort), but, in the last analysis, we have to form all of our knowledge in an experiential, enacted way (Varela et al. 1991; Noë and Thompson 2002; Noë 2004). This implies sensorimotor engagement with our environment. The

3 See, in particular his analysis of Being-in-the-World, Being-Together, Attunement, Care, Facticity and Historicity. Heidegger shows how the “ontic” spatiotemporal and social determinations are based on a more primordial Being-in-the-World, Being-Together and Being-Toward-Death, and how these determinations are not extrinsic to the existence, but belong to its very core.

two parts, perceiving and acting, cannot be separated as in the traditional “sandwich model”, according to which we receive some input (perception), process it (cognition) and give some output (action) (see Ward and Stapleton 2012). Initially and for the most part, we do not perceive for some theoretical reasons, but perception is meant to inform our action. While acting, we create certain perceptions that are fed back into the system, so that the results of our actions can modulate the way we act and we can become more adapted in our activities.

As already implied in the concept of embeddedness, embodied cognition is also extended: we think to a large extent with the help of the things in our environment. The body itself has an extension and duration, and it can extend to other things, e.g. for a blind person, a stick becomes a sensing organ; when we drive a car, our perceived bodily dimensions extend to the car (so we can feel where we can pass and where not), etc. A very special way of extending embodied knowledge is to adopt another person’s viewpoint. Indeed, other people are very important “tools” for extending and correcting our knowledge and behaviour.

Embodiment always also entails a certain emotive background for our life and activities (Damasio 1994, 127–64; Maiese 2014). On a very basic level, the needs that structure our world and experience have an intrinsic affective aspect: by definition, a need is something we *feel* as a need. It concerns our bodily existence in a positive or negative way, and we feel it as first-person subjects. On an even more basic level, we could say in a Spinozist way that the very fact of being directed towards our surroundings and being interested in them is an affect, more specifically, a desire (see *Ethics* III, prop. 6–9, Spinoza 2002, 283–4, cf. also Maiese 2011). Embodied existence is a desiring existence. It is deeper than our conscious activities and self-understanding, which presuppose it. Desire is the basis of our intentionality and directedness towards something.

In addition to the five Es mentioned above (embodied, enacted, embedded, extended, emotive) there are other important topics related to embodiment. First of all, implicitness. This is an important aspect of the “personal” or “tacit knowledge” discussed by Michael Polanyi (1962): a behaviour always contains more than can be expressed in words or rules. In order to master an art (swimming, sewing, playing the piano, etc.), textbook information is not enough, and instead one has to acquire personal and experiential understanding of the art. This applies not only in sports and crafts, but also in science (how to handle a scientific apparatus, how to read the results, and so on).

Embodied knowledge is emergent, it is not previously given in a programme, but emerges in interactions with the environment. For example, Esther Thelen and Linda Smith (1996) have shown that although the general developmental histories of children can be similar, they accomplish them by very different means. Andy Clark (1998) has discussed emergence in the case of robotics, with important implications for the general theory of embodiment.

There is one aspect that is present, but not particularly stressed in the current ET, namely the joy entailed in the skilful performance of an art or ability, when one is not constrained by the particulars of the art, but is able to perform them smoothly, gracefully, effortlessly (the “feeling of flow”, see Csikszentmihalyi 2014).

Finally, embodied knowledge has to be learned through experience and with guidance:

Connoisseurship, like skill, can be communicated only by example, not by precept. To become an expert wine-taster, to acquire a knowledge of innumerable different blends of tea or to be trained as a medical diagnostician, you must go through a long course of experience under the guidance of a master. (Polanyi 1962, 56; cf. Deleuze 1994, 164 sqq.)

It also has implications for moral self-development (Jackson 1983; Strejcek and Zhong 2014). In the following, we trace the aforementioned topics in the *Analects*.

Embodied Knowledge in the *Analects*

With the help of ET, we can make sense of the parts of the *Analects* that would seem the least philosophical to a Western reader,⁴ such as the descriptions of Confucius' behaviour in book 10.

When called on by his lord to receive a guest, his countenance would become alert and serious, and he would hasten his steps. When he saluted those in attendance beside him – extending his clasped hands to the left or right, as their position required – his robes remained perfectly arrayed, both front and back. Hastening forward, he moved smoothly, as though gliding upon wings. Once the guest had left, he would always return to report, “The guest is no longer looking back.” (10.3)⁵

4 “This chapter is often skipped over in embarrassment by Western scholars” (Jones 2008, 121).

5 All the English translations of the *Analects* are from Slingerland (2003).

君召使擯，色勃如也，足躩如也。揖所與立，左右手。衣前後，檐如也。趨進，翼如也。賓退，必復命曰：「賓不顧矣。」⁶

When entering the gate of his Duke, he would draw himself in, as if the gate were not large enough to admit him. He would not come to a halt at the centre of the doorway and when walking would not tread upon the threshold. When passing by his appointed place, his countenance would become alert and serious, he would hasten his steps, his words falling to a whisper as if he could barely get them out. When he ascended to the Duke's dais with the hem of his gown gathered in his hands, he would draw himself in, slowing his breath to the point that it seemed as if he were not breathing at all. Upon leaving the Duke's dais, his expression would relax as he descended the top stair, and he would seem at ease. On reaching the bottom of the stairs, he would hasten forward smoothly, as though gliding upon wings. When returning to his own place, he would resume his attitude of cautious respect. (10.4)

入公門，鞠躬如也，如不容。立不中門，行不履闕。過位，色勃如也，足躩如也，其言似不足者。攝齊升堂，鞠躬如也，屏氣似不息者。出，降一等，逞顏色，怡怡如也。沒階趨進，翼如也。復其位，蹶蹶如也。

This shows that Confucius' speech, behaviour and even physiological reactions change according to the situation.⁷ His actions have attained a supreme grace, smoothness and ease (he seems to "glide upon wings" 翼如也). His steps, countenance, breathing and everything else changes according to the context: on official occasions he is serious, barely breathes, hastens his steps, at home he is relaxed.

When grasping the official jade tablet, he would draw himself in, as if he could not bear its weight. Sometimes he held it high against his forehead as if saluting, while at other times he held it low at his waist as if offering a gift. Alert and serious, his expression would be like someone about to go into battle, and he would walk with shortened steps as though each movement were carefully scripted. During the ceremonial exchange of gifts, his countenance was accommodating; when having his private audience, he seemed at ease. (10.5)

執圭，鞠躬如也，如不勝。上如揖，下如授。勃如戰色，足蹢蹢，如有循。享禮，有容色。私覲，愉愉如也。

6 The Chinese originals are from the *Chinese Text Project*.

7 It is indeed an *ars contextualis*, as Hall and Ames (1998) put it.

The same book of the *Analects* also describes Confucius' way of dressing, eating, sleeping, sitting, riding a carriage and so on. This shows how all of his behaviour is ritualized, up to the very details of his everyday life and even unconscious behaviour (sleeping, dreaming, cf. 7.5). This implies that Confucius' teaching is well embodied and embedded in a context.

Embedded (Temporal)

This is summed up in the final part of book 10, where Confucius says: "This pheasant upon the mountain bridge – how timely it is!" (山梁雌雉，時哉！時哉！). This timeliness has been traditionally understood as describing his own behaviour – Confucius is a "timely sage". In ET, it is stressed how the agent is embedded in a context, and this context should not be understood only in spatial but also in temporal terms: an action takes place at a certain time, with certain temporal modulations (the swiftness or relaxation of Confucius' steps, for example), and at a certain age of the agent:

My master only spoke when the time was right, and so people never grew impatient listening to him. (14.13)

夫子時然後言，人不厭其言。

To speak when it is not yet time to speak – this is called being rash. To not speak when it is time to speak – this is called being secretive. To speak without taking into account the countenance of one's lord – this is called being blind. (16.6)

言未及之而言謂之躁，言及之而不言謂之隱，未見顏色而言謂之瞽。

Confucius said, "The gentleman guards against three things: when he is young, and his blood and vital essence are still unstable, he guards against the temptation of female beauty; when he reaches his prime, and his blood and vital essence have become unyielding, he guards against being contentious; when he reaches old age, and his blood and vital essence have begun to decline, he guards against being acquisitive." (16.7)

孔子曰：「君子有三戒：少之時，血氣未定，戒之在色；及其壯也，血氣方剛，戒之在鬪；及其老也，血氣既衰，戒之在得。」

This means that there cannot be a context-independent set of principles that one could apply anytime and anywhere. Or to put it differently, the most universal principles necessarily have to be enacted according to the time and context. The same action can be right or not right, depending on the

conditions. Flexibility is thus an inevitable part of adaptive embodied behaviour. A smooth and graceful action is an action that with real-time feedback from the environment is able to change and adapt itself.⁸ This is obvious on the everyday level: for example, when I walk around, my feet and body spontaneously adapt to the conditions of the terrain (whether it is slippery or not, what obstacles there are, in ascent or descent, etc.), or when I write with a pencil, I automatically adapt to the specific pencil and paper I have at hand (its thickness, the degree of pressure needed, the qualities of the paper and the support it is on, etc.).⁹

Flexibility as sensitivity to context is highly valued by Confucians:

The Master was entirely free of four faults: arbitrariness, inflexibility, rigidity, and selfishness. (9.4)

子絕四：毋意，毋必，毋固，毋我。

The Master said, “The gentleman is true, but not rigidly trustworthy.” (15.37)

子曰：「君子貞而不諒。」

On one occasion, two students ask Confucius the same question, but he gives two different answers to them. A third student overhears both exchanges and asks for the reason. Confucius replies:

The Master said, “Ran Qiu is overly cautious, and so I wished to urge him on. Zilu, on the other hand, is too impetuous, and so I sought to hold him back.” (11.22)

子曰：「求也退，故進之；由也兼人，故退之。」

A good teacher is able to adapt the message according to the receiver.

Confucian self-cultivation extends flexibility to very complex situations of social behaviour. Experientially, such adaptivity is clear and easy, but computationally, due to the real-time feedback and non-linearity that arises from it, it is extremely complex. This is why machines, while excelling at things we

8 This does not necessarily mean being “spineless”, because certain social contexts (a tyranny, for instance) might themselves be unadaptive to a wider order of things, to the *dao*. The *Analec*t contains plenty of denunciations of the social order of the time by Confucius.

9 Merleau-Ponty (1945, 180–1) remarks the ease with which organists are able to adapt themselves to different organs that can be very different from each other in their physical makeup. A few hours of practice are sufficient for an organist to be able to play on a new organ. Keys, stops and pedals are positioned at different places and distances, but an organist has a “feeling” of how to play an organ, and so is able to adapt to the actual instrument.

find difficult (computing), tend to be less adept at things we find very easy (smooth movement).

Enacted

Confucius makes it clear that true knowledge is enacted and expresses itself in corresponding actions: knowledge is meant to enlighten action, and action reveals the level of knowledge:

The Master said, "I can talk all day long with Yan Hui without him once disagreeing with me. In this way, he seems a bit stupid. And yet when we retire and I observe his private behaviour, I see that it is in fact worthy to serve as an illustration of what I have taught. Hui is not stupid at all." (2.9)

子曰：「吾與回言終日，不違如愚。退而省其私，亦足以發。回也，不愚。」

The Master said, "Look at the means a man employs, observe the basis from which he acts, and discover where it is that he feels at ease. Where can he hide? Where can he hide?" (2.10)

子曰：「視其所以，觀其所由，察其所安。人焉廋哉？人焉廋哉？」

Someone who is accomplished is upright in his native substance and fond of rightness. He examines other people's words and observes their demeanour, and always takes the interests of his inferiors into account when considering something. (12.20)

夫達也者，質直而好義，察言而觀色，慮以下人。

The Master replied, "I observed him sitting in the presence of adults, and also walking alongside his elders. He is not looking to improve himself, but is just after quick success." (14.44)

子曰：「吾見其居於位也，見其與先生並行也。非求益者也，欲速成者也。」

Words, speaking and language are among the important aspects of expression, but they are also suspect, because it is much easier to lie with words than with bodily behaviour; it is easy to talk more than one understands, giving rein to boasting, deception, and make believe.

The Master said, "People in ancient times were not eager to speak, because they would be ashamed if their actions did not measure up to their words." (4.22)

子曰：「古者言之不出，恥躬之不逮也。」

The kernel of Confucius' thought is the practice of rites, which is a set of choreographed movements, songs and utterances, i.e. it is intrinsically embodied and enacted. There is more to the rites than just rote repetition, and we shall come to the when we talk about self-cultivation later in this chapter.

Extended

One aspect of the embeddedness and contextuality of knowledge is that it is extended (Aizawa 2014). First, the body itself is an extended vehicle of understanding, and second, it also extends to the items in the surroundings. For example, for a Confucian, musical instruments, ritual clothes and vessels, books, bows and arrows, etc. are all part and parcel of knowledge and meaning-making.

Ru Bei [sent a messenger expressing his] wish to have an audience with Confucius, but Confucius declined, saying that he was ill. As soon as the messenger went out the door, however, Confucius picked up his zither and sang, making sure that the messenger could hear him. (17.20)

孺悲欲見孔子，孔子辭以疾。將命者出戶，取瑟而歌，使之聞之。

Those instruments extend the body, through them we are lead to the higher meanings of existence (filial piety, humaneness, appropriateness etc).¹⁰

The most important extensions of knowledge are other human beings, and the most important extension is to replace one's own viewpoint with another person's. This idea of extension is also expressed in the Golden Rule:

Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire. (12.2 and 15.24)

己所不欲，勿施於人。

This is the prerequisite for becoming humane, *ren* 仁. It is both descriptive and prescriptive: on the one hand, humans have (as Mencius later explained) a proclivity to empathize with others (as exemplified in Mencius' famous story of spontaneously wanting to help a child who is about to fall into a well); and, on the other hand, during our lifetime we should expand and develop this capacity. It potentiates self-awareness: I am aware of others being aware of me. This leads to a generalized self-reflection (*fan* 反) in Mencius.

10 It should be noted that in Western descriptions of embodiment technical devices are very often used as examples of extendedness (e.g. the analysis of the "things at hand" by Heidegger 1996, 94–97).

Emotive

In this framework, emotions are not inherently an impediment to knowledge, and the aim of self-cultivation is not to rid oneself of emotions, but to refine and deepen them. A ritual without emotions is dead and without any real meaning and value. Our being-in-the-world and being-with-others are laden with emotive valences. Some of our strongest emotions are related to our fellow human beings: there is affection between parents and children, husband and wife, among friends, and so on. This is what happened after the death of Confucius' favourite student:

When Yan Hui passed away, the Master cried for him excessively. The disciples reproved him, saying, "Master, surely you are showing excessive grief!" The Master replied, "Am I showing excessive grief? Well, for whom would I show excessive grief, if not for this man?" (11.10)

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顏淵死，子哭之慟。從者曰：「子慟矣。」曰：「有慟乎？非夫人之為慟而誰為！」

Two things are important here: first, that Confucius behaves in this way not just in any situation, but in this special case, and thus he is not emotionally unstable. And second, that he does not seek to inhibit himself at the death of his favourite student, and is instead a sensitive man who is emotionally affected by the most intimate human relations. Feelings come first and ritual comes later (see 3.8).

Emotional engagement is one of the most important prerequisites of the rites:

The Master said, "A man who is not humane – what has he to do with ritual? A man who is not humane – what has he to do with music?" (3.3, translation modified)

子曰：「人而不仁，如禮何？人而不仁，如樂何？」

Lin Fang asked about the roots of ritual. The Master exclaimed, "What a noble question! When it comes to ritual, it is better to be spare than extravagant. When it comes to mourning, it is better to be excessively sorrowful than fastidious." (3.4)

林放問禮之本。子曰：「大哉問！禮，與其奢也，寧儉；喪，與其易也，寧戚。」

Emotions are the basis of things, and with rituals one can refine them, thus improving the whole human personality.

In general, an exemplary person is free from negative emotions:

Sima Niu asked about the gentleman. The Master replied, “The gentleman is free of anxiety and fear.” “‘Free of anxiety and fear’ – is that all there is to being a gentleman?” “If you can look inside yourself and find no faults, what cause is there for anxiety or fear?” (12.4)

司馬牛問君子。子曰：「君子不憂不懼。」曰：「不憂不懼，斯謂之君子已乎？」子曰：「內省不疚，夫何憂何懼？」

Those emotions are not so much discarded by a conscious effort, but rather disappear by themselves when the personality is refined.

Implicitness

The contextuality of knowledge also leads to specific linguistic practices. On the one hand, words and sentences, of course, enable us to take a distance from the immediate situation and to take into consideration further facts and details. But on the other hand, this very distancing capacity of language has the danger of not suiting the context. Better than giving a general explanation is to give hints and suggestions, so that the person concerned can work out their own understanding in the particular context.

The Master said, “I will not open the door for a mind that is not already striving to understand, nor will I provide words to a tongue that is not already struggling to speak. If I hold up one corner of a problem, and the student cannot come back to me with the other three, I will not attempt to instruct him again.” (7.8)

子曰：「不憤不啟，不悱不發，舉一隅不以三隅反，則不復也。」

The main aim of studying is to learn to (re)construct, to attain the generative principles that manifest themselves in a specific situation. The teacher gives one “corner”, one aspect, and the student has to guess the other, related aspects or “corners”. In another fragment, Confucius approvingly says:

Zigong, you are precisely the kind of person with whom one can begin to discuss the Odes. Informed as to what has gone before, you know what is to come. (1.15)

賜也，始可與言詩已矣！告諸往而知來者。

Embodied knowledge is inherently overdetermined and the linguistic strategies that want to conform to this knowledge must also be greatly implicit, in an intentional attempt to imply in an utterance more than is explicitly said. An attempt to directly express an idea would remain inherently partial, poor. This kind of teaching was later taken to the extreme in the encounter dialogues of the *chan* Buddhism tradition, where a certain way of speaking and behaving was deemed to express enlightenment. Confucius' acts and words were also taken to express the right *dao*, a certain broader way of existence that one had to unfold for oneself from the cues that he gave.

Emergence

Contextual and embodied knowledge is essentially emergent. It does not contain universal ideas that are given beforehand, but arises in a specific context between specific interacting agents. We considered a fragment where Confucius gave different advice to different students according to the situation – this means that he did not have a ready precept, but that the knowledge emerged in the specific situation, taking into account the character of the given student. Another example is the following:

The Master said, “Do I possess wisdom? No, I do not. [For example, recently] a common fellow asked a question of me, and I came up completely empty. But I discussed the problem with him from beginning to end until we finally got to the bottom of it.” (9.8)

子曰：「吾有知乎哉？無知也。有鄙夫問於我，空空如也，我叩其兩端而竭焉。」

This is also a model to follow. One should encounter a situation with as few presuppositions as possible, being as “empty” as possible, and so let the articulations of the situation emerge by themselves. The problem with pre-given knowledge is that it makes you “full”, so that you are not able to see the situation objectively or impartially, but take some arbitrary familiar aspects of it and bend the whole situation according to some pre-existing matrix. Instead, if one is “empty” then one does not impose a ready-made framework on the situation, but is able to listen to the nuances of the particular situation, and then respond adequately.

Ease and Joy

The thorough ritualization of life should not be understood to mean that Confucius was constantly following some ritual rules and thus must have been rigidly formal all the time (although some of his critics might have said so). On the contrary, we see that he switched between effort in official occasions and relaxation in other times (cf. “In his leisure moments, the Master was composed and yet fully at ease”, 子之燕居，申申如也，夭夭如也，7.4), and that he achieved an ease also in those official occasions. In the words of Confucius’ student You Ruo:

When it comes to the practice of ritual, it is harmonious ease that is to be valued. It is precisely such harmony that makes the Way of the Former Kings so beautiful. If you merely stick rigidly to ritual in all matters, great and small, there will remain that which you cannot accomplish. Yet if you know enough to value harmonious ease but try to attain it without being regulated by the rites, this will not work either. (1.12)

禮之用，和為貴。先王之道斯為美，小大由之。有所不行，知和而和，不以禮節之，亦不可行也。

Or as Confucius puts it:

One who knows it is not the equal of one who loves it, and one who loves it is not the equal of one who takes joy in it. (6.20)

知之者不如好之者，好之者不如樂之者。

Here, there is a deepening emotional involvement: first you know, then you like and finally you are able to enjoy it. The most famous quotation in this respect is 2.4:

The Master said, “At fifteen, I set my mind upon learning; at thirty, I took my place in society; at forty, I became free of doubts; at fifty, I understood Heaven’s Mandate; at sixty, my ear was attuned; and at seventy, I could follow my heart’s desires without overstepping the bounds of propriety.”

子曰：「吾十有五而志于學，三十而立，四十而不惑，五十而知天命，六十而耳順，七十而從心所欲，不踰矩。」

Here Confucius is, in a sense, finally able to forget about ritual, so that even when he follows his heart’s desires he does not overstep propriety. The joy that a smooth action brings is consistent with the findings of contemporary

psychology: Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2014) speaks about the “feeling of the flow” in certain activities that require concentration and exercise (playing the piano, tennis, etc.). Athletes, dancers, and musicians can attain this feeling during a good performance, and it is rewarding and enjoyable in itself.

Joy is directly related to the ability to live out one’s years – both for internal reasons (it can be supposed that good mood generally produces better health) and most importantly for external reasons (when you are joyful, you get along better with others, and thus it lessens the probability of punishment, mutilation and execution):

Min Ziqian was attending the Master, standing at his side in a straight and correct manner; [also attending were] Zilu, looking bold and uncompromising, and Ran Qiu and Zigong, both of whom appeared happy and at ease. The Master was pleased, but remarked, “Someone like Zilu will not get to live out his years.” (11.13)

閔子侍側，闔闔如也；子路，行行如也；冉有、子貢，侃侃如也。子樂。「若由也，不得其死然。」

Emotional self-cultivation does not imply suppressing emotions, but rather regulating them:

Confucius said, “Beneficial types of joy number three, as do harmful types of joy. Taking joy in regulating yourself through the rites and music, in commending the excellence of others, or in possessing many worthy friends – these are the beneficial types of joy. Taking joy in arrogant behaviour, idle amusements, or decadent licentiousness – these are the harmful types of joys.” (16.5)

孔子曰：「侍於君子有三愆：言未及之而言謂之躁，言及之而不言謂之隱，未見顏色而言謂之瞽。」

An exemplary person avoids, to use Spinoza’s terms, partial joys (or “tickle” *titillatio*, as he calls them) that concern just one part of our body, not the whole of us. Note that all of the beneficial joys are social, and that most of the time the exemplary person is at ease and joyful.

This leads to a *wuwei* situation, to effortless action:

The Master said, “One who rules through the power of Virtue is analogous to the Pole Star: it simply remains in its place and receives the homage of the myriad lesser stars.” (2.1)

子曰：「為政以德，譬如北辰，居其所而眾星共之。」

The Master said, “How majestic! Shun and Yu possessed the entire world and yet had no need to actively manage (*yu* 與) it.” (8.18)

子曰：「巍巍乎！舜禹之有天下也，而不與焉。」

The Master said, “Is Shun not an example of someone who ruled by means of *wuwei*? What did he do? He made himself reverent and took his proper [ritual] position facing south, that is all.” (15.5)

子曰：「無為而治者，其舜也與？夫何為哉，恭己正南面而已矣。」

Whereas Csikszentmihalyi speaks about the feeling of flow in the case of master performers in sports and music, here the feeling arises from life as a whole, most of one’s actions being appropriate to the context.

Self-cultivation

Michael Polanyi (1962) distinguished between explicit and tacit knowledge, and embodied knowledge is very much about the second. Explicit knowledge can be sufficiently specified in detail and transmitted by prescription over large spatiotemporal gaps (e.g. when I read a book written in another country in another era), and its understanding can be nearly instantaneous (e.g. if I learn the fact that $1+1=2$ or that Zhu Xi 朱熹 was born on October 18, 1130). But embodied knowledge is to a large extent tacit, it cannot be adequately specified, and its teaching involves personal example and a process of experience that cannot be shortened at will.

Much of Confucius’ educational programme was precisely about how to convey tacit, implicit, embodied knowledge, and his personal example was extremely important in this (hence also the importance of his behaviour described in book 10 and discussed above). This kind of apprenticeship for students involves personal development and self-cultivation. It might seem strange that Chinese traditions lacking many aspects of religion (most notably, a description of gods or a God), like Confucianism or Mohism, have nevertheless inspired people for centuries (or even millennia) with a fervour and dedication that otherwise seem to characterize religious movements. While surely there were also aspects of religion in the narrow sense, they were often downplayed, and at least part of this may come from the embodied and contextual practices themselves. Ritual, for Confucius, is by itself self-cultivation:

The Master said, “If you are respectful but lack ritual you will become exasperating; if you are careful but lack ritual you will become timid; if

you are courageous but lack ritual you will become unruly; and if you are upright but lack ritual you will become inflexible. (8.2)

子曰：「恭而無禮則勞，慎而無禮則蕙，勇而無禮則亂，直而無禮則絞。君子篤於親，則民興於仁；故舊不遺，則民不偷。」

The ritual decides whether a characteristic trait (carefulness, courage, respect, uprightness) becomes a weakness or strength. The ritual has an integrating and modulating effect on different aspects of character. A weakness is something that is separated from the rest of one's personality, community and nature, and ritual is a way to integrate these and thus to refine one's character as a whole, developing its different aspects, preventing it from remaining one-sided.¹¹

This self-cultivation entails both effort and non-effort:

The Master said, "When native substance overwhelms cultural refinement, the result is a crude rustic. When cultural refinement overwhelms native substance, the result is a foppish pedant. Only when culture and native substance are perfectly mixed and balanced do you have a gentleman." (6.18)

子曰：「質勝文則野，文勝質則史。文質彬彬，然後君子。」

The whole of self-cultivation is not only a conscious striving, but the aim is to engage oneself as a whole, one's whole body, including unconscious strivings. The aim is not to artificially create a new man, but with the help of artificial or external means, like rites and music, to cultivate and refine one's natural character. As in Mencius' famous simile: one should not force one's nature like plucking the seedlings in order to "help them grow", but rather take care of one's nature and to gradually, in the course of time cultivate it, so that it grows by itself and becomes more nuanced.

Ritual is a kind of self-discipline:

Yan Hui asked about humaneness. The Master said, "Restraining yourself and returning to the rites constitutes humaneness. If for one day you managed to restrain yourself and return to the rites, in this way you could lead the entire world back to humaneness. The key to achieving

11 In C.G. Jung's (1971) theory the human psyche tends to develop, in the course of life, aspects that are less pronounced in the beginning, so that under ideal conditions a person in a sense finally changes into their opposite. This is the phenomenon of "enantiodromia" or becoming-opposite. Of course, the previous dominant characteristics do not go away, so that the result is not a simple opposite of the initial situation, but a more nuanced, richer personality. It must be noted that Jung was also directly influenced by the Chinese *yin-yang* thinking.

humaneness lies within yourself – how could it come from others?” Yan Hui asked, “May I inquire as to the specifics?” The Master said, “Do not look unless it is in accordance with ritual; do not listen unless it is in accordance with ritual; do not speak unless it is in accordance with ritual; do not move unless it is in accordance with ritual.” Yan Hui replied, “Although I am not quick to understand, I ask permission to devote myself to this teaching.” (12.1, translation modified)

顏淵問仁。子曰：「克己復禮為仁。一日克己復禮，天下歸仁焉。為仁由己，而由人乎哉？」顏淵曰：「請問其目。」子曰：

「非禮勿視，非禮勿聽，非禮勿言，非禮勿動。」顏淵曰：「回雖不敏，請事斯語矣。」

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Zizhang asked about getting by in the world. The Master replied, “In your speech, be dutiful and trustworthy, and in your conduct be sincere and respectful. [...] When standing still, visualize these principles standing by your side; when riding in your carriage, see them resting before you on the crossbar. Only then will you get by in the world.” Zizhang then wrote these words on the end of his sash. (15.6)

子張問行。子曰：「言忠信，行篤敬，[...] 立，則見其參於前也；在輿，則見其倚於衡也。夫然後行。」子張書諸紳。

Ritual becomes a constant means of self-monitoring, a vehicle for self-development and also a very high ideal. Supposedly it means, on the one hand, an ever more graceful and perfect performing of the rites in the strict sense of the word, but on the other hand, it also develops a feeling of flow that one should strive to attain in every life-situation. By perfecting the rites in the narrow sense, Confucius’ follower refines their psycho-somatic capacities and learns to become “empty”; then they extend this attitude to all of the existence. As we said, the feeling of ease and joy that it brings is also immediately rewarding, not to mention its generally positive effects on one’s social interactions.

Conclusion

In this article I argued that the Embodiment Theory (ET) could help us understand some critical aspects of the Chinese tradition in general and of the *Analects* in particular. I brought out several important topics of ET in the *Analects*: embodiment, embeddedness, enactment, extendedness, emotivity, implicitness, emergence, joy and self-cultivation. Arguably the abundance of

examples suggests that those topics were also important in the *Analects*, and that ET could be used as a useful framework for interpreting the *Analects*. This article focused on the *Analects*, but it must be said that similar examples can easily be found in most of the Chinese philosophical texts. Contemporary ET formed quite recently, and largely as a critique of the former dominant Western understanding of knowledge, but as we can see, its central topics were discussed early on in the Chinese tradition. Due to the more or less continuous development of this tradition over two and a half millennia, a large body of philosophical texts has accumulated that could be useful for the development of ET itself, on the condition that its proponents become more aware of similar ideas in the Chinese tradition.

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