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DISCUSSIONI E RICERCHE

Thierry Meynard, Aristotelian Ethics in the Land of Confucius. A Study on Vagnone’s Western Learning on Personal Cultivation

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Introduction

There is a close correlation between an ethical system and the values of the society that adheres to them because an ethical system is often an attempt to spell out universal and perennial values in a particular culture; this exposition of values is often a reflection of the values of a given society in a particular historical period. When two great moral traditions such as Aristotelian and Confucian ethics encounter one another, they may see common values or they may view the other as barbarian. In the last few decades, many scholarly studies have focused on Renaissance Aristotelianism and it is now proven that Aristotelianism continued to exert considerable influence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe. However, there is still very little research on the spread of Aristotelianism to other parts of the world at that time.

We shall present here the first encounter between Chinese ethics and Western ethics that occurred during the Ming dynasty. This encounter produced a very creative work, *The Western Study of Personal Cultivation (Xiushen xixue 修身西學)*. The Italian Jesuit Alfonso Vagnone authored this work in collaboration with some thirteen scholars residing in the Shanxi province. It was published in the years of 1637-1639. I have recently presented a study in the Chinese language that analyzes the *Xiushen xixue*, showing its connection to three works: the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Summa Theologica*, and a Renaissance commentary on Aristotelian ethics. In this new paper, I would like to discuss how the *Xiushen xixue* raises philosophical issues under the background of Confucian ethics. After first providing some information on how the work was composed, I shall enumerate the sources that Vagnone used and then show that this work cannot be considered as a complete treatment of Christian ethics (religious and philosophical), but rather it
should be seen as a Christianized version of Aristotelian ethics in a Chinese context. The scholastic nature of the work is manifest in its attempt to present a moral science which comprises different ethical domains, such as person, family, and country, each with their own unique principles; we shall point out some tensions in the text between this scholastic analytic approach and the more synthetic approach of Chinese thought.

Secondly, Vagnone presents different elements that constitute the good; significant among these is the notion of profit or usefulness. Because Confucian thought considers profit immoral, Vagnone needed to create a new terminology and argumentation to make it acceptable to Chinese scholars. In regards to the ethical discussion of happiness, we shall show that Vagnone has refrained from discussing the Christian conception of eternal happiness; instead he follows the Aristotelian and Confucian focus on happiness in this present life. Although both Confucianism and Aristotelianism stress the importance of moral cultivation, they depart on the question of the origin of virtues. The former considers virtues as innate while the latter sees them as acquired. Vagnone also introduces the distinction between moral and intellectual virtues. Finally, we shall see that, when Vagnone presents magnanimity, a key-virtue for Aristotle, he shifts its meaning towards the Christian virtue of humility, a term that resonates better because it is also an important value for Chinese culture.

A Collective Project

Around the year 1636, the Italian Jesuit Alfonso Vagnone (1566–1640), known in Chinese as Gao Yizhi 葛一志, gathered a group of Chinese literati to write a new book. With a half-dozen publications of hagiographies and moral literature Vagnone had already built a solid reputation as a scholar while living in the township of Jiangzhou 江州, in the southern part of the Shanxi 山西 province, over the previous twelve years.1 Given this background, this gathering of a Western scholar with a few Chinese scholars did not draw too much attention from the locals. He was well known for his publication of scientific books, such as the Kongji gezhi 空際格致 (Knowledge about the Atmosphere), based on Aristotle’s Metereologica.2

This time, Vagnone presented his Chinese friends with the more ambitious project of dealing with Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics. Vagnone would need the help of thirteen literati to complete a bulky work in ten juan. Some of these Chinese scholars had collaborated with Vagnone before, such as the two brothers Han, Han Yun 韩云 (1596–1639) and Han Lin 韩霖 (1601–1644), and Duan Gun 段雲 (d. 1641). Among them, four of them had passed the highest grade of jinshi 进士 in the imperial examination: Ni Guangjian 倪光荐, Geng Zhangguang 耿章光, Han Lin and Wang Zheng 王微 (1571–1644). All of them were sympathetic to this new doctrine of Catholic Christianity, and half of them would receive baptism at some point of their life. Han Lin and Wang Zheng became prolific Catholic writers, publishing works in religious matters and also in more profane topics like military defense or hydraulics.

Over the course of his academic career in China, Vagnone collaborated extensively with literati to write and publish literary works. He employed different methods of col-

1 The town is called now Xinjiang 新疆, annexed to the city of Yuncheng 运城.

2 For a presentation, see Willard J. Peterson, Western Natural Philosophy Published in Late Ming China, «Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society», vol. 117, n. 4, 1973, pp. 295-322.
laboration depending on the project. For example, when he wrote the *Dadao jiyan* 達道紀言 (*Illustrations of the Grand Dao, 1636*), he would «dictate» (*shoujiao* 手授) in Chinese the 355 *sententiae* and *chreiai* one by one from a common book of moral sayings in his hand. Instead of translating directly from the original, he would usually adapt the moral sayings to the Chinese context. His collaborators would make suggestions about the content before they wrote down the text. Later, this text was polished into elegant Chinese. Vagnone would check the final text before submitting it for approval to his Jesuit superiors. Only then could the Chinese characters be carved on the wooden blocks in Jiangzhou, and the books printed and distributed.¹

Since most of the Chinese literati held jobs in the government Vagnone could not hope to secure their collaboration for the weeks necessary to complete a large project like the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Instead, as the title page of the *Xiushen xixue* states, Vagnone «wrote» (*zhuan* 稿) the ten *juan* and then each *juan* was «revised» (*jiao* 輯) by a team of three or four literati, who are listed at the beginning of each *juan*. The book was then «checked» (*ding* 許) by three Jesuits Niccolò Longobardo 龍華民 (*1565-1655*), Rodrigo de Figueiredo 費樂德 (*1594-1642*) and Michel Trigault 金彌格 (*1602-1667*), and finally «approved» (*zhun* 評) by Francisco Furtado 傅汎濟 (*c. 1589-1653*), the vice-provincial of the Jesuit vice-province of China, which fell under the province of Japan at the time. Furtado would have appreciated Vagnone’s effort since he himself had published the *Huanyouquan* 寰有詮 (*Explanation of heaven and earth*), derived from the *De Coelo*, and was about to complete his publication of the *Minglitan* 名理探 (*Inquiries into the principles of names*), derived from Aristotle’s *Book of Logic*.² Vagnone’s book was published in Jiangzhou around the year 1638, with the title of *Xiushen xixue* 修身西學 (*Western Learning on Personal Cultivation*).³

**The Structure and Sources of The Work**

While establishing schools in Europe during the 16th century, the Jesuits wrote down their model for humanistic education in the *Ratio Studiorum* (1565-1599). They used this document as a basis for the curriculum when creating later schools. The philosophical studies at these schools focused around the works of Aristotle. These were taught out of a standard manual of commentaries the Jesuits at Coimbra published between 1592 and 1606, called the *Conimbricenses*.⁴ These commentaries exerted their influence

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³ About the establishment of the date, cf. *Mei Qianli 徐謙立 (Thierry Meynard), Wanning zhongxi lunli xue de xiangyu*, cit., pp. 103-104, note 3.

⁴ (1) Commentarii Colligii Conimbricensis Societatis Jesu in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis Stagirtae (Commentaries of the Coimbra College of the Society of Jesus on the Eight Books of the Physics of Aristotle the Stagirite), 1592; (2) Commentarii Colligii Conimbricensis Societatis Jesu in quatuor libros de Coelo Aristotelis Stagirtae (Commentaries ... on the Four Books of the De Coelo of Aristotle), 1592; (3) Commentarii Colligii ... in libris meteorum Aristotelis ( ... on the Books of the Meteorology), 1592; (4) Commentarii ... in parva naturalia ( ... on the Parva Naturalia), 1592; (5) Commentarii ... in libris Ethicorum ad Nichomachum ( ... on the Books of the Nichomachean Ethics), 1593; (6) Commentarii ... in duos libros De Generatione et corruptione ( ... on the Two Books, On Generation and Corruption), 1595; (7) Commentarii ... in tres libros De Anima (on the Three Books of the De Anima), 1595; (8) Commentarii ... in universam dialecticam Aristotelis (Commentaries ... on the Whole Logic of Aristotle), 1606.
much beyond the Jesuit colleges, and were reedited more than one hundred times until 1640. When the Jesuits came to other parts of the world, they naturally taught with these manuals and sometimes they translated them from Latin into vernacular languages.

In 1935 Hubert Verhaeren attempted to establish a relationship between four works produced by the Jesuits and their collaborators in China with the *Conimbricenses*, claiming that these Aristotelian works were translations or renditions based on the Coimbra commentaries. However, after looking more closely at the text, recent scholars have contested this claim. For example, Isabelle Duceux shows in her study that the two juan of the *Lingyan lishao* (Humble discussion on the questions of the soul) is not a mere synopsis of the Coimbra commentary on the *De Anima* because its second juan deals with a theological explanation on the soul that is absent from the Coimbra commentary.

It makes sense that the Jesuits would present Aristotelian ethics to the Chinese. As David Lines as shown, the Jesuit curriculum in philosophy paid a great attention to the teaching of ethics, even though this was not a focus as strong as logic or metaphysics. Starting 1593, ethics became a regular class of the Collegio Romano (founded in 1551). The definitive version of the *Ratio Studiorum* (1599) mandates the subject be taught to third-year students in philosophy. Distinguishing between moral philosophy and moral theology was one of the major challenges for Jesuits teaching this curriculum because the content of the two classes overlaps in many places. Certainly, for European students and teachers it was difficult to completely abstract themselves from the pervasive ideas of moral theology while studying moral philosophy. But in China the distinction between moral philosophy and moral theology played an important role because it allowed the missionaries to provide the Chinese literati with moral teaching based only on reason and on the other hand to provide the converts with a moral teaching based on the Bible and the Gospel. As European students were trained in building philosophical foundations before tackling moral theology, the Chinese literati were invited to study first the moral philosophy of the West, with the hope that this would prepare them to accept the ethics of the Gospel.

Concerning the *Xiushen xixue*, Verhaeren remarked that the corresponding *Conimbricenses* has nine *disputationes*, while the *Xiushen xixue* has ten juan, and that this small discrepancy is due to the fact that Vagnone has merged in one juan the two *disputationes* of the *De Bono* and the *De Fine*, and split the ninth *disputatio* on the moral virtues in three distinct juan: Temperance, Courage, Justice. Based on this preliminary analysis of Verhaeren, we can go further and explore the commonalities and differences between the two works. I have established below a chart of correspondence between the two works. Since none of the juan have a title, I have indicated the main theme of each juan, based on the titles of the different chapters within a particular juan:

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2. *Hubert Verhaeren*, *Aristote en Chine*, «Bulletin Catholique de Pékin», 1935, pp. 417-429. Besides the *Xiushen xixue*, the three other works are the *Lingyan lishao*, the *Huanyouquan* and the *Minglitan*.
This chart clearly shows a similar structure, which seems to confirm Verhaeren’s conclusion. However, Verhaeren has overlooked three major discrepancies. First, the order is not strictly the same. Juan 4 corresponds to the disputatio 6 on human feelings, and so the Chinese text deals with human feelings before addressing the question of human actions; this is in the reverse order of the Coimbra commentary that deals first with actions and then with feelings. Moreover, while the Xiushen xixue discusses the three moral virtues, it does not follow the order of the Coimbra commentary, but the one of the Summa Theologica.

Second, entire sections of the Xiushen xixue, such as the detailed presentations of the eleven passions in Juan 4, have no corresponding parts in the Coimbra commentary but are present in the Summa Theologica. Moreover, the chapter 4 of Juan 10 is a lengthy and detailed presentation of commercial rules such as the different elements constituting a contract: the goods being exchanged, the modes of payment, the transfer of property, the promise, etc. Those items are treated neither in the Nicomachean Ethics nor in the Summa Theologica. Probably Vagnone inspired himself from a Renaissance treatise on commerce.

Third, the mode of writing is very different. The Chinese text is a straightforward description of Aristotelian ethics, presenting basic concepts and providing brief argumentations. Concerning the Coimbra «commentary», it is not really a commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics because it does not provide any direct explanation of the text. Following the scholastic method, we have instead a series of disputationes that deal with problems of interpretation of the Aristotelian text; either because there are some contradictions in the text itself or because there are different ways to understand a particular point. Besides Aristotle, the authors being mentioned are Aquinas, Augustine, Scotus, Ockham, etc. For each disputatio, there is one first articulus to sup-
port one stance, and a second *articulus* to support the contrary stance. Finally, a third *articulus* proposes the resolution. This scholarly method was suited for Jesuit teachers who understood well the Aristotelian corpus and the different debates around its interpretation. Obviously, Vagnone could not enter into so many subtleties so he left aside the conflicting interpretations given by the ancient authors and chose instead to give a standard explanation that generally corresponds with the third *articulus* in the *Conimbricensis*.

Because of those three major discrepancies between the *Xiushen xixue* and the Coimbra commentary, I would correct Verhaeren’s statement: the Coimbra commentary is indeed a source for the *Xiushen xixue*, but Vagnone has certainly used other sources. The *Xiushen xixue* is clearly an Aristotelian work on ethics since we can find in it the basic concepts of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The times Vagnone quotes Aristotle or *Ya-li-shi-duo* 亞里士多 (pp. 54, 139, 188) he describes him as «master of morality» (禮學之師, p. 139). Yet the concepts are interpreted through the lens of Scholasticism and the structure of the work does not follow the text of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but rather the commentarial tradition of Scholasticism that is based on the *Summa Theologica* 1*¹* 11*¹* and 11*¹* 11*⁶*.

This is the reason why Book ix on friendship was left out: despite a lengthy treatment, Aristotle himself did not regard friendship as a virtue as such, and later on, Cicero also saw friendship not as a virtue but as a relationship based on virtue. From the Middle-Ages, friendship was not taught during the course on ethics, since the focus was on moral virtues alone.

Clearly, the *Xiushen xixue* incorporates Christian ethics. However it should not be considered as a work of Christian ethics as such, because it lacks some essential features of Christian ethics, mainly the Decalogue, the notion of sin, the theological virtues and the moral sanctions in the after-life (paradise-hell). This is the reason why I found the affirmation of Thomas Lee a bit misleading when he talks about the *Xiushen xixue* as «the first introduction of St. Thomas’ ethical ideas in Chinese», or «a fairly orthodox summary of Thomist philosophy, especially in the area of Christian ethics».1 The Thomistic point of view would consider the *Xiushen xixue* only a partial presentation of ethics since it does not deal specifically with Christian ethics.

Also, as Charles Schmitt has strongly advocated, Renaissance Aristotelianism was accompanied with a strong eclecticism, incorporating elements of other schools of thought, especially Stoicism,2 and this influence can be felt in the *Xiushen xixue*. This is not surprising if we bear in mind that the spirituality of the Jesuits stressed directing one’s life according to the divine will, and therefore promoted a spiritual indifference regarding health or illness, richness or poverty, etc.3 Another Stoic element is the search for *ataraxy* amid hardships. Ricci translated passages of Epictetus’s *Enchiridion*, and, as I have shown in my study of the *Dadao jiyan* 達道紀言, Vagnone himself was very much

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influenced by other Stoic writers like Seneca. Yet, in the Xiushen xixue, Vagnone avoids the harshness of Stoicism, and like Ignatius of Loyola, he recognizes that the feelings are part of our human condition and therefore men should not be insensitive like wood (cf. p. 57).

Also, being written for the Chinese literati, we find also many elements of Confucian ethics in the work, particularly the stress on virtue. As we shall illustrate along this study, while the Coimbra commentary offers a possible conciliation of Christian philosophical ethics with the pagan ethics of Aristotle, the Xiushen xixue attempts to prove to the Chinese literati that, while Western ethics differ from Confucian ethics, they are still compatible. Therefore, we should understand the Xiushen xixue as a Christianized version of Aristotelian ethics blended with Stoic elements written into the context of Late Ming China. This work is able to harmonize these differing ethical teachings because they share many commonalities, but as we are going to see in the following sections the ethical ideas in the work present a stumbling block to widespread acceptance into Confucian ethics.

The Question of Ethics as a Moral Science

In his preface (p. 18), Vagnone states that philosophy (fei-luo-suo-fei-ya 費羅所非亞) in the West consists in the «study of nature and principle» (xinglizhixue 性理之學) and the «study of righteousness and propriety» (yilizhixue 義禮之學). While the former aims at investigating material objects, the latter aims at recognizing the highest principles in human beings. Vagnone introduced here the Western distinction between natural sciences and moral sciences, a distinction that did not exist as such in China at the time. With the term «study of righteousness and propriety» Vagnone introduces a neologism to translate the Western notion of morality or ethics. Much later, in the nineteenth century, the Japanese scholar Inoue Tetsujirō (1855-1944) would create another neologism, the term of lunlixue 倫理學, for his philosophical dictionary (1881) that was adopted by the Chinese and is still used today.

On the contrary, the expression «study of nature and principle» is very familiar to the Chinese, but Vagnone gives it a meaning that is completely untraditional. This is a bold move, because the expression since the Song dynasty is an equivalent for the Confucian school. For a Neo-confucian, the «study of nature and principle» would certainly not be limited to material objects but would necessarily include principles of morality. By adopting such an ambiguous terminology for his presentation of Western philosophy, Vagnone may be easily understood as intending to build a moral system replacing the traditional teaching, or at least marginalizing it.


In the proemium of the Coimbra commentary, philosophy is divided into dialectical, natural and moral. Cf. ccen, p. 3.

Among the «five constant virtues» (wuchang 五常) of Confucianism he selected righteousness and propriety as representing the Western notion of morality or ethics. The other three virtues are: benevolence (ren 仁), wisdom (zhi 智) and trustfulness (xin 信). In the sixth chapter of juan 10, Vagnone mentions the virtue of piety toward parents, a virtue annexed to justice, and calls it with the name of ren. This shows that Vagnone feels free to give new meanings to the Confucian virtues, but by giving to ren such an auxiliary position, he would have surely offended many literati.
In the first chapter of *juan* 1, we see Vagnone displacing the traditional categories further. Talking about personal cultivation, he mentions that «the wise in the East and in the West all have sincerity (chengyi 誠意) first» (p. 20). However, according to the traditional arrangement of the *Daxue*, sincerity is ultimately established on the «investigation of things» (gewu 格物). This clearly shows that Vagnone’s attempt in distinguishing natural science from moral science does not fit the Confucian framework. In fact, Vagnone confronts the holistic *episteme* of the Chinese and proposes distinguishing between two different realms: the realm of natural sciences founded on the «investigation of things» and the realm of a moral science founded on «sincerity». Even though the Jesuits did not see a complete separation between the two realms, they challenged the Chinese tradition by emphasizing that the study of those two realms was founded on two different rationalities, somehow heterogeneous. After the Renaissance, Western thought has further widened the gap between natural sciences and humanities, between facts and values, and so the Western challenge became even more severe in China.

By constituting ethics as a science, Scholasticism clearly departed from Aristotle. This one had recognized ethics as being in the realm of praxis, of the practical and productive lives, while contemplative life concerns the universal and immutable truth (*theoria*). Because ethical principles deal with both the contingent and the necessary, they are valid «generally and for the most part»; they cannot aim at the same degree of universality as mathematics (*NE* I.iii). However, Aquinas systematized Aristotelian ethics to the point where we see the creation of a *scientia moralis* that asserts itself as exhaustive and giving moral certainty in all possible situations. Following Aquinas, Vagnone presents the list of virtues with the parts of each virtue. Not only do these lists seem to attempt to cover all possible situations, they would also seem quite arbitrary for people outside of the scholastic tradition.

For example, concerning the four moral virtues of the Christian tradition, the Coimbra Commentary mentions that some Fathers of the Church had argued that four moral virtues were needed because paradise has four rivers.¹ In *juan* 6, Vagnone states what seems a new argument for the four moral virtues: as there are four natural elements (water, fire, earth and air), similarly the human mind needs four moral virtues (cf. p. 121). In fact, Vagnone’s argument carries little weight because in Chinese thought there are five natural elements, and therefore five virtues. In other words, while Vagnone introduces an ethical system that contains within it many arbitrary elements he also seems completely unaware of the arbitrariness of the scholastic classifications that he tends to see as absolute truths. Most probably Vagnone’s classifications would seem as arbitrary to a Chinese as the very detailed Buddhist classifications. Even if a Chinese would admit the arbitrariness of the classifications in his own tradition, he would likely stay with his own tradition. It is clear that the Western ethical system comes, in many ways, in disagreement with the moral system of Confucianism. But also the degree of sophistication of the classifications in the *Xiushen xixue* raises questions. The idea of an ethical system goes against the spirit of Confucianism that favors a more synthetic approach.

We meet the same predicament with an ethical system establishing a strict division between different ethical realms or domains. At the beginning of the first *juan*, Vagnone states that the study of morality follows a set order, from what is inside to what is out-

¹ *ccen*, Disputatio vii, q. 6, a. 1, p. 76. Aquinas himself does not mention this argument; cf. *ST* 1º 11º, q. 61, a. 1-2.
side: first it starts with the person itself, then deals with the family, and finally with the country. This tripartite division, based on a passing remark by Aristotle in the *Eudemian Ethics*, was adopted by Greek and Latin commentators, and associated with three works: Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, and the pseudo-Aristotelian *Oeconomics*. Aquinas used the same division, which continued to be used in the manuals of morality until the seventeenth century.\(^1\) Our Coimbra commentary also mentions this division, following the categories of Aquinas: the ethics of the individual (*ethica monastica*), the ethics of the family (*oeconomica seu familiaris*) and political ethics (*politica seu civilis, p. 3*).\(^2\)

Vagnone is very skilled in expressing Western ethics with Chinese terms. The three parts of Western ethics are named after the Confucian concepts of «personal cultivation» (*xiushen*)«ordering of the family» (*qijia*) and «management of the country» (*zhiguo*). When Vagnone wrote the *Xiushen xixue*, most likely he already had in mind a trilogy he would go on to complete in the following years with a second book on family ethics, the *Qijia xixue* [*The Western Learning on Arranging the Family*], and a third book on political ethics, the *Zhiguo xixue* [*The Western Learning of Managing the Country*]. This division corresponds indeed to the three courses on ethics that were taught in some colleges in Europe. However the style of the *Xiushen xixue* is very different from the style of the *Qijia xixue* or of *Zhiguo xixue*. In those two books, Vagnone abandoned the scholastic style, and instead adopted the humanistic style, with plenty of historical, literary and biblical *exempla* and *sententiae*.\(^3\)

The scholastic authors generally agreed that ethics were composed of three distinctive parts and that of these parts personal ethics is the most important, but they did not necessarily agree that personal ethics should be the foundation for economic and political ethics. Interestingly, at the beginning of the first *juan*, Vagnone seems to distance himself from the Western tri-partite division, and instead, in conformity with the Confucian insight, he stresses the «progression» (*xu*) of ethics, from the individual to the family, and then to the country, and he quotes there the *Daxue*: «personal cultivation is the root». Vagnone has grasped here the dynamic way Confucian ethics correspond with the creative movement of human mind.

However, in all the rest of the book, Vagnone is introducing many classifications concerning the human actions, the feelings, etc., which tend to split the human mind. The tension between the Scholastic and the Confucian systems is apparent in the whole work and at times it is clear that Vagnone has difficulty reconciling the two. For example, in chapter 4 of *juan* 7, he struggles to distinguish between natural, or acquired, prudence (*congxing zhi zhi* 從性之智) and supernatural prudence (*chaoxing zhi zhi* 超性之智). According to the Coimbra commentary, prudence contains different subject parts (*subjectae partes*) and, among them, five are the strongest (*potiores*): *solutaria*, *oeconomica*, *militaris*, *regalis*, *politica*.\(^4\) Vagnone mentions only four subject parts:

\(^3\) Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples was the most important proponent of a new method of exegesis, with illustrations of the text of Aristotle by exempla. See Kraye, *op. cit.*, p. 328.
\(^4\) *ccen*, *Disputatio* viii, q. 2, art. 3, pp. 81-82. Aquinas had established such a classification based on the subject of ethics, related to one person or to a multitude. Since different purposes unite the multitude, different kinds of prudence are therefore needed: the military prudence of the soldiers who are gathered to fight, the domestic prudence of a family who is united for the whole life, the regnative prudence of the subjects who are forming one country, and the political prudence of everyone, aiming at the common good. Cf. *ST II* 116, q. 47, a. 10-11; q. 48, a. 1; q. 50, a. 4.
the individual prudence (duzhi 獨智), the prudence of arranging family (qijia 華智 齊家之智), the prudence of managing the country (zhiguo 治國之智), and the prudence of leading the army (shuaijun 帥軍之智). This way of dividing prudence into four actors suggests that there are four distinct ethical domains: individual ethics, domestic ethics, political ethics and military ethics. Not only is this four-fold division difficult to reconcile with the tripartite repartition discussed above, which does not include the military, but moreover it seems at odds with the dynamic dimension of ethics that Vagnone set out in the beginning of his work. One suspects that, after all, for Vagnone qijia and zhiguo are distinct realms of human affairs that are ruled by different principles. Following Aristotle, Scholasticism maintains that political life and social life grow out of the family, yet develop as independent spheres that obey different principles and thus form different ethical realms; different principles apply when man is considered in relation to himself, to his family or to his country. This vision is clearly at odds with the Confucian view of zhiguo as an extension of qijia, and qijia as an extension of xiushen.1 In the whole book, Vagnone splits categories into sub-categories and sub-sub-categories. Vagnone’s systematized way of approaching ethics is at odds with the synthetic nature of the Chinese thought and it would surely be difficult for Chinese scholars to understand and incorporate this approach into their own.

THE GOOD AND THE QUESTION OF PROFIT

The Nicomachean Ethics and their commentaries in the West, like the Conimbricensis, begin by defining the good as «what all things tend to» (bonum est quod omnia appetunt, p. 6). Because ethics deals with human desires, there is usually no attempt to discuss tendencies of the natural world. However, in the second chapter of juan 1, Vagnone does not begin with the definition of the good, but first asserts that within the natural world are certain innate tendencies, like the fire «moving upwards» or the birds «fearing the arrow and flying into the blue sky» (p. 21). The existence of tendencies or ends in all things suggests that human intention also has natural tendencies; human intention is not aimless but directed toward an end. Indeed, Aristotelian ethics and even more Stoic ethics presuppose a cosmic order that human nature imitates. Traditional Chinese philosophy has a similar presupposition that the human being exists within the greater context of an ordered cosmos that contains myriad other beings. Having explained the existence of an end for human intention, Vagnone identifies, in the next chapter, this end with the good:

Those who want to clarify the tendencies of the human being need first to understand its principle which is covered by one word only: the good. What is the good? It is what fits nature. If you have not yet reached it, you wish to tend toward it; tending toward it, you hurry to it; hurrying, you make efforts with the hope of getting it; getting it, you come to a halt, and finding rest in it, you enjoy it. In the contrary case, you hate it and avoid it.2

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1 As Professor Natali remarked to me, Xenophon and Plato would have agreed to Confucius on this point, since those two considered that the management of big estate and the government of a small city are the same, relying on the capacity to govern oneself. On the contrary, Aristotle distinguished independent ethical realms.

2 諸學者皆曰，孔子以好美為美，好善者尚，宜與之同，欲則勿，向則退，趣則力行者，獲則止而安之，棄之矣。反是，則廢棄、逃避之。
Here Vagnone imitates the style of the opening of the *Daxue* 大學, and also he connects the notion of good to *xing* 性, a key concept of Chinese philosophy often translated to mean «nature». Similarly, Aristotle and the Scholastics recognize also a close connection between the good and nature. But what is most striking here is that Vagnone did not translate *bonum* with the traditional Chinese concept of *shan* 善, but with an unconventional compound word, *haomei* 好美 (good and beautiful). This Chinese neologism could be linked to the Aristotelian concepts of *katon* or *kalokagathia*.

Certainly Vagnone wanted to mark the specificity of the Western notion of good, a specificity that will become clearer in the discussion of the different goods.

In the same chapter, Vagnone presents the distinction between the intellective desire (*siwu* 司悟, *intellectivus appetitus*) and the sensitive desire (*siyu* 司欲, *sensitivus appetitus*). The first desire aims at «knowing the truth of an object» and the second desire aims at «appreciating its good» (p. 23). The *Xiushen xixue* poses the question: with the fundamental desires in the human heart of knowing the truth and appreciating the good, how is it possible for people to choose the opposite? Indeed, it certainly appears that people who do certain bad acts, like killing themselves out of despair or throwing themselves into fire, are not aiming at the good. Yet Vagnone asserts that even these people pursue a good:

> When the sensitive desire becomes blind, it is unable to understand the good to be followed and the harm to be avoided; although the intellective desire inclines toward the truth, the intelligence is obstructed, it takes the wrong for the true, the empty for the real, the perverse for the correct, the selfish for the public.

In other words, nobody chooses in full awareness something bad, and everyone chooses something they consider good for themselves. However, they can be mistaken on what constitutes the good.

In chapter four, Vagnone mentions the three components of the good: *yi* 義 for *hon-estum*, *li* 利 for *utile*, *le* 爽 for *iuncudum* (p. 25). Indeed Aristotle accepted the idea of profit as a good, and Scholasticism adopted also this view which is expressed in the *Summa Theologica* or the Coimbra commentary. This is not to say that these ethical systems supported consequentialism or utilitarianism; their emphasis is not on external goods but on an internal good. Nonetheless, the Western acceptance of the notion of profit based on Aristotelian and Christian ethics was at odds with the Confucian stance that profit is not a good. Since the times of Confucius, the Chinese looked at the idea of profit *li* 利 as morally unacceptable and opposed to the notion of justice *yi* 義. In his

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1 *Daxue*. 知止而後有定, 定而後能靜, 靜而後能安, 安而後能慮, 慮而後能得。

2 The Coimbra commentary has similar explanations, based on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. *ccen*, *Disputatio* 1, q. 1, a. 3, p. 9: «Appetitus sensitivus est appetitus innatus quo res fertur in bonum sibi conveniens praeeunte notitia sensus»; «Appetitus intellectivus est appetitus innatus quo res appetit bonum conveniens praevia notitia intellectus: qui appetitus nihil est aliud voluntas». Also cf. *st* Ⅰ, q. 80, a. 1-2. The *Xiushen xixue* has left aside the *naturalis appetitus*, which is also an innate desire, but the senses or the intellect do not know its goodness. Vagnone did not invent these neologisms, which were created some thirty years before by Ricci in his *Tianzhu shiyi*. Ricci mentions the three powers (*potestates*) of the soul: besides the intellect and the senses, there is also memory. Cf. *tzse*, chapter 7, § 449. The theory of the three powers of the soul originates in the *De Trinitate*, ix, x and xiv. Aquinas simplified the powers of the soul into two only. Cf. *st* Ⅰ, q. 79, a. 7.

3 *xxxi*, pp. 23-24: 使司愛欲而如督, 彌能明所當從之好美, 與所當避之損害? 維司悟難向真而, 但霊穏蒙塞, 以或為為真, 腦為為實, 以邪為正, 以私為公。

4 *NE* ii.iii; *st* Ⅰ, q. 5. a. 6; *ccen*, *Disputatio* 1, q. 3, a. 1, p. 13.
Ricci spent significant energy in an attempt to convince the Chinese scholar that profit was good. He quoted the Chinese Classics, first arguing that the ancient rulers of China acted for profit and then stating this search for profit was legitimate because these rulers were not acting for personal and selfish gains but for the profit of the people.1

In the Xiushen xixue, Vagnone similarly mentions that seeking profit is a legitimate component of the good when it is «for the benefit of others» (為他物愛欲). While Scholasticism adopts an experiential order, starting with the honestum, moving to the utile, and ending with the iucundum, Vagnone yields to Confucianism, and adopts a moral order, with justice (yi) as the superior good, pleasure (le) as a lower good, and profit (li) as the lowest good (p. 25).

While Vagnone downgraded the importance of profit, he still maintains that it is a good; this is not simply out of faithfulness to Aristotle and his concept of sumpheron (the expedient), but rather because one of the Jesuit missionaries primary arguments for conversion to Christianity was the profitable end of earning paradise. In the chapter 6 of the Tianzhu shiyi, Ricci describes the scene of the after-life where God pronounces the ultimate judgment and distributes rewards and punishments. In the dialogue, the Chinese scholar expressed to Ricci his shock: «Since a junzi does not do the good in order to obtain profit or avoid harm in this world, how could he consider profit or harm in the life to come?»2 Ricci concedes that doing the good in order to gain entrance into paradise is not as worthy as doing the good only to obey to the will of God.3 He concludes that the highest good in Christianity should not be considered as purely an external good with the subsequent external reward of a life in paradise, but rather it is an internal good achieved through compliance to a will of God that perfects human nature.

Unlike Ricci, Vagnone chose to stay within the Aristotelian framework of the present life and did not discuss the after-life. This way Vagnone avoided the risk of appearing to promote a consequentialist or utilitarian ethics that encourages people to act morally in order to attain the beatific life in paradise. By avoiding this issue Vagnone was able to make a correlation between the Confucian idea that associated an internal good, expressed with the term ren 仁, with the ultimate good and the idea in Aristotelian ethics that the good is ultimately connected with human nature. While this same correlation exists in Christian ethics, because of the belief in God and the eternal life this may not appear so clearly to someone newly introduced to the Western system.

Vagnone’s insistence on naming profit as a good would certainly be rejected by the disciples of the influential School of Mind who insist on non-intentionality (wuyi 無意). However, his stance was not without allies in the intellectual conversation of Late Ming China, as there existed a strong current that rebelled against the double dangers of intuitionism and subjectivism of the School of Mind and challenged the intellectualism of the School of Principle; instead this current advocated «practical study» (shixue 實學) for the profit of the people. Vagnone himself directed his works towards practical ends, writing many works in ethics, children’s education and science. He explicitly made a

1 tzsy, § 349-352.
2 tzsy, § 361: 行善以致現世之利, 遠現世之害, 君子且非之, 來世之利害, 又何足論哉?
3 Ricci illustrates this with the story of a companion of Saint Francis of Assisi who was willing to continue his life of asceticism even though he knew that he was damned. tzsy, § 368-371.
reference to «practical study» in the first chapter of the juan 1 of the Xiushen xixue. Many of the literati with whom he was collaborating, such as the brothers Han, were deeply engaged in developing economic, social, and cultural policy. Placed into this broader intellectual context we can understand better Vagnone’s call for seriously considering the implications of profit in a moral system.

Vagnone was certainly aware of the place these ideas would take in the larger intellectual discourse and used an important strategy of creating a neologism, haomei, in order to express this new concept of goods that includes justice, pleasure, and profit. He created a new term because in Chinese language, there is only one word, shan, to express the idea of goods and the idea of goodness. Vagnone uses also this traditional concept of shan to express human goodness, and when he does, he is very careful to delineate between his new term, haomei, and the traditional Chinese term to explain that human goodness does not include any idea of profit, like in the first chapter of juan 7 when he states: «shan means something which is appropriate and conforms to principle, and thus cannot be called a profit or pleasure». Vagnone saw the implications of introducing into the Chinese moral discourse an untraditional idea such as profit and so he attempted to use the new term of haomei to circumscribe this idea of profit to the level of human goods.

The Substance and The Function of Happiness

Unlike Ricci, in the Xiushen xixue Vagnone chooses not to discuss divine law and its rewards (paradise-hell), but he instead remains mostly within the more Confucian friendly Aristotelian framework and its focus on happiness in this life. He deviates from Aristotle in his use of terms to how happiness relates to life, instead following the scholastic line: in Ne, Aristotle discusses happiness in relation to three different forms of life (the life of enjoyment, the political life and the contemplative life), while the Xiushen xixue in juan 2 follows Scholasticism and discusses happiness in relation to three objects: external goods, corporal goods and spiritual goods.

Vagnone argues that happiness consists in spiritual goods and, in order to do so, he eliminates the other two possible candidates: external goods (chapter 5) and the goods of the body (chapter 6). There are six arguments to prove that happiness does not depend on external goods: external goods, like wealth, are decided by fortune, and independent from one’s efforts; external goods are unstable, while true happiness is obtained when one follows moral principles; external goods need to be distributed, but the beauty in happiness is that it can be preserved; wealth and honors are hard to get, but happiness is available at will; wealth often comes along with vices, but happiness and true virtue go together; both a wise man or a stupid man can obtain social positions, but only a wise man can obtain true happiness (cf. pp. 35-37). Aristotle maintains that external goods do not provide ultimate happiness, yet, unlike Aristotle, Vagnone’s text

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1 xsxx, p. 126: 善者, 宜而合理, 非利非樂之謂也.
2 The Coimbra commentary deals with this question in details (Disputatio Tertia: De Felicitate, Quaestio I: Utrum felicitas consistit in bonis extremis, pp. 20-21), presenting first the position that happiness consists in external goods (Articulus i, Quae argumenta ostendere videantur in iis consistere), then the correct position affirming the contrary (Articulus ii, Negativam partem quae questionis veram esse), and thirdly a refutation of the arguments of the first position (Articulus iii, Solution argumentorum primi articuli). The Xiushen xixue did not engage as such in the disputatio but presented only the correct position with six points which follow neatly the Coimbra text in its Articulus Secundus.
does not mention that some basic conditions for happiness may be required or that happiness may be frustrated by misfortune. The text states that happiness is completely independent from external goods, and completely depends on us. In contrast to Aristotle’s view it suggests therefore that everyone can reach happiness.

Having removed external goods as avenues for attaining happiness, the text investigates whether happiness consists in the goods of the body. This argumentation is based on an understanding the body and soul exist in a strict hierarchy: «The body is the servant of the mind; the sagacity of the mind cannot be compared to the shining beauty of the body; how could happiness consist in the body?»1 The text makes also the point that, if happiness consists in the body, then human beings and animals would share the same happiness, which, of course, is not acceptable. The text also points out the temporal nature of the body, presenting how it quickly withers. Demonstrating that the body has such an insignificant moral worth, the text argues that those who esteem the body make a great mistake, such as a certain E-bi-gu-luo 厄彼故落 who «practiced the pleasures of carnal desires» and whose teaching has been rejected by all the philosophical schools until that time.2 Following the heritage of the Medieval and Renaissance authors, Jesuit missionaries presented to the Chinese a caricature of Epicurus and Epicureanism.3 Vagnone also distances himself from Aristotle and Aquinas in his view on the role of the body in attaining happiness, rather displaying a tendency towards a Platonic dualism that dissociates the body from happiness. In chapter 7, Vagnone states that «the body is a floating shell, but the mind is the true self».4 Aristotle and Aquinas consider the body as necessary for happiness but we do not see this idea transferred to the Xiushen xixue.5 Vagnone’s account of happiness completely eliminated the Aristotelian necessity of some basic external goods for happiness, but instead holds a Stoic and Christian view that happiness is purely based on the subjective state of the mind.

Having eliminated external goods and corporal goods, Vagnone can show in chapter 7 that happiness rests in mental or spiritual goods. He uses two categories of Chinese philosophy to discuss happiness: substance (ti 體) and function (yong 用): «The substance of true happiness reaches up to reality and goodness; the function of happiness has to do with two powers, the intellective and the desiderative powers».6 Vagnone describes first what the function of happiness means:

The intellective and desiderative powers are the two hands of human mind. The intellective power investigates the things, exhausts their principles and deducts the cause of the existence of all things, as well as it deducts the truth among the many truths and the good among the many goods. The desiderative power seeks the perfect truth and the perfect good that are already known, keeping it in mind and enjoying it.7

In chapter 7 of his Tianzhu shiyi (§ 449-452), Ricci explained the notions of the powers, or faculties, of the human soul. Vagnone adopts the same neologisms, however unlike

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1 xxsx, pp. 37-38: 身, 神之役也。身之顚秀光澤, 修神之靈通, 境壇不賓矣, 可為人之真福耶?
2 The Coimbra commentary deals with the question (Quaestio 11: utrum felicitas consistit in bonis corporis), presenting first an affirmative answer (Articulus 1, argumenta pro parte affirmativa), and then a negative answer (Articulus 11, astrauitur pars negativa) that the text of the Xiushen xixue follows closely. The Coimbra commentary includes also a diatribe against Epicurus which is reflected in the Xiushen xixue. rzst, § 355, p. 304.
3 St 11*, Q.4, A.5.
4 xxsx, p. 39: 身, 神, 真我。
5 xxsx, p. 39: 真福之跡, 至切實, 至美善; 真福之用, 歸於司明, 司愛之司焉。
6 xxsx, p. 39: 真福之跡, 至切實, 至美善; 真福之用, 歸於司明, 司愛之司焉。
7 xxsx, pp. 39-40: 故明悟, 愛欲之司者, 身神之二手也。司明悟, 格物窮理, 推萬有之理, 真善之善焉。司愛欲, 求得已知之至善至善, 聲膺悅慙焉。
Ricci he explains the intellective power by using the Confucian notion of «investigating the things and exhausting their principles» (gewu qiongli 格物窮理). He explains further that the intellect and the will are complementary, and shows how the two powers are related to happiness:

The intellect understands thoroughly the perfect truth and the perfect good, and it does not deceive itself with illusions, but it remains unclear about the subtleness of what to be chosen and to be followed. The will cherishes the perfect truth and the perfect good, does not fall into ugliness, and calms all the movements of the heart. Without the intellect, my mind cannot know happiness; without the will, my mind cannot enjoy happiness. The two appetites work fully and thus happiness can be complete. By starting with the two appetites, happiness should be obtained in the end.¹

Finally, Vagnone discusses the substance of happiness:

Concerning the substance of happiness, the holy and wise people in the West all agree that it is to recognize the Creator. Since He created all things at the beginning, He must make all things return. If the human mind fully knows this, then he would obtain the subtleness of happiness and be immediately satisfied with it. Saint Augustine calls the Lord of Heaven, and says [to Him]: “To know all things and not to know You, this is an extreme misery! To know all things and to know You, this is not in order to know the things but in order to know You, and this is to reach the perfection of happiness.”²

This passage can be related to the conception of happiness in the contemplative life, with the knowledge of divine things, as stated in Book X of the Nicomachean Ethics, but it is expressed in characteristically Christian terms, with the idea of knowing God as Creator. Quoting Augustine, Vagnone expresses that knowledge does not bring happiness if it is not ultimately the knowledge of God.³ In scholastic terms, Vagnone describes here the supernatural happiness in this life (supernaturalis beatitudo in mortalem vitam). By describing happiness in its two dimensions of substance (ti) and function (yong), Vagnone suggests to a Chinese reader that the substance of happiness and its function exist always at the same time, as was stated by the Song philosopher Zhu Xi. This translates Scholasticism’s dual conception of happiness: on one hand, happiness in this life is always an activity of the soul, involving the intellect and the will, and in this sense it is called natural happiness, and on the other hand, happiness in this life is directed toward the knowledge of God, and in this sense it is called supernatural happiness. Vagnone expresses this dual dimension of happiness as:

The beauty of perfect happiness is not in the person itself but comes from outside, and yet it does not depend on anything outside of the mind [of the person], but can be attained only by his mind.⁴

¹ xsxx, p. 40: 司明，洞悟至真至善，不妄聾偽奇幻，昧于當撫常從之妙。司愛，欲愛至至真善，不溺物腑。安達謹心之向。令無司明，真福莫能通于吾神；無司愛，真福莫得享于吾神矣。二司之功盡，而真福始全。蓋始肇于彼，而終必愈于此也。

² xsxx, pp. 40-41: 至言真福之肺，西之古今聖賢默契焉。而以造物主當之。蓋既為萬物所造始，則必為萬物所依歸。吾神明知切懷，則亦當獲真福之妙而快足矣。奧斯定聖人呼天主曰：「知萬物不知窮者，不須之至矣。知萬物並知窮者，非為知物，為知者，獲真福之至之矣。」

³ Augustine, Confessions v.4: «Infelix enim homo, qui scit illa omnia, te autem nescit; Beatus autem, qui te scit, etiam si illa nesciat».

⁴ xsxx, p. 39: 至真之矣，非人自有，自外致之；然非係神外也，神自備而致之。
In other words, in its substance (ti) happiness is constituted by knowing an external being, God, who does not depend on human beings; and in its function (yong), happiness is only reached through the activities, or operations, of the human soul. Vagnone describes here the paradox of happiness that is constituted from outside and yet relies on human mind.

This dual dimension of happiness, being both natural and supernatural, is clearly expressed in the Coimbra commentary.1 As we can see Vagnone’s account of happiness is a Christianized version of Aristotle’s view on happiness, combining the Aristotelian notion of happiness as an activity of human mind with the Christian notion of happiness as a state of mind founded on the contemplation of God.2 Very aptly, Vagnone translated the scholastic notion of happiness as an activity (operatio in Latin, and energeia in Greek) with the Chinese notion of function (yong) and the scholastic notion of happiness as founded on God with the Chinese notion of substance (ti). However, when Neo-Confucianism talks about substance and function, this should not be understood according to the Western categories of transcendence and immanence, and by defining the substance of happiness as knowledge of God, Vagnone subtly changes the original meaning of the Chinese categories.

Unlike Ricci in the Tianzhu shiyi, Vagnone did not discuss the «supernatural happiness in the other life» (supernaturalis beatitudo ad aliam vitam), since this would imply the existence of paradise and thus raise a belief difficult for the Chinese literati to accept. However, he does hint at it in the last sentences of the juan 2, where the text states that those who obtain true happiness in this world must enjoy complete happiness in heaven. Vagnone focused his argument on true happiness in this life as knowing God, surely a first step in his attempt to bring Chinese people to believe in eternal life. This emphasis on happiness in the present life was a mark of the optimistic view on human nature and human life that characterizes the Renaissance movement. Unlike the ascetic tradition that emphasized the misery of human life, many treatises in Renaissance praised the excellence and dignity of human life and attempted to establish a system of ethics that was appropriate for laymen living in the secular world.3 Vagnone artfully used the focus on happiness in this human life that Confucianism shares with the Western tradition to create common ground.

**Moral Innatism or Moral Acquisition**

Because Aristotelian, Christian and Confucian thoughts share the same conception of moral monism, it was not problematic for Vagnone, during his discussion of the goodness and evil in human actions in the first chapter of juan 5, to affirm: «evil is not something real, but only an absence of goodness, same as death is not a reality as such, but the absence of life».4 During the Song and Ming dynasty, some intellectuals opposed

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1 *ccen*, *Disputatio iii, Quaestio iii, Utrum beatitudo consistat in animi operatione*, pp. 25-29.
2 As the Coimbra commentary states: «The supreme happiness consists in the most perfect operation of everything, but the intuitive contemplation of the divine essence belongs to this; and therefore the supreme happiness consists in this contemplation» (Item summa beatitudo consistit in operatione omnium perfectissimae, sed intuita contemplatio divinae essentiae est hujusmodi; igitur in ea summa beatitudo consistit, p. 27).
4 *xsxx*, p. 84: 人性有善有惡，有為惡之懲。是惡者，非物之實，善之無耳，猶恐非實物乃生之無也.
heavenly principles (tianli 天理) to human desires (renyu 人欲), yet this concept never became a radical dualism or Manichaeism. As Thomas Lee mentions, Ming intellectuals held a monist position and understood the goodness of human nature as a spontaneity that follows heavenly principle.1

Western ethics and Confucianism share also some common ground on the issue of virtue, both stressing that the moral good consists in personal virtue. However, they depart on the question of the source of virtues: innate virtues for Confucianism and acquired virtues for the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. In the Summa Theologica, Aquinas states that «every virtue is an ornament to the soul», and he illustrates this by quoting Psalm 45: «the glory of the king’s daughter is inside…»2 Similarly Ricci stated that:

Virtue is the precious clothing of the essence of the mind. Through long training in thinking about virtue, virtuous acts develop. It is like clothes; they can be put on, or removed. Those who are called wise people owe it to the thought of enjoying doing good, but it is the contrary for those doing evil. Virtue and vice are all invisible clothes, and only the invisible mind that I also call spirit wear these clothes.3

Probably inspired by the story in the Psalm 45 of the king’s virtuous daughter, Ricci illustrated this concept with a story taken from the Zhongyong: «Over her embroidered robe she puts on a plain garments» (衣錦尚絝), Ricci commenting that the moral worth does not come from innate talents inherited at birth, but comes from «decorating» (shì 飾) them with inner virtues (§ 437). In the first chapter of juan 5, Vagnone rephrases this passage of Ricci’s text; he uses the same expressions and the same metaphors of virtues as clothes that the mind wears (cf. p. 85). In complete opposition to the Confucian assertion that virtues are innate, Vagnone clearly affirms that, although virtues are an internal characteristic of the person, they are acquired through practice.

This leads him to distinguish between natural goodness (liangshan 良善) and acquired goodness (xishan 習善). Vagnone holds natural goodness is without merit because it is shared by human beings and animal beings (cf. p. 85). In contrast, acquired goodness is a higher form of goodness because it depends on our own efforts. Therefore, the human will, led by the intellect, commands good actions when the intellect abides in reason, and it commands evil action when the intellect goes against reason (cf. p. 86). Here Vagnone copies a passage from the chapter 7 of the Tianzhu shiyi that explained the fundamentals of this Aristotelian view on goodness as the result of the practice of virtues (§ 435-438). In juan 6, Vagnone describes the different characteristics of virtue as follows:

Virtue is accumulating goodness in the mind and expressing it in all parts of the body, and thus this is called goodness. The human mind originally is without any art or virtue; it is like a virgin book with nothing written on it. Once there is writing and words, then there is an accumulation of virtues.4

1 Lee, op. cit., pp. 359-361.
2 St. Th. 11a 11a. 1 a. 1: «Omnis enim virtus pertinent ad spiritualam animae decorum, secundum illud Psalmi, omnis gloria eius filiae regis ab intus…»
3 Tzsy, § 438: 德乃紱性之寶服，以久習義念，義行生也。謂服，則可著、可貌，而得之于精然為善之念，所謂聖賢者也，不著者反是。但德與罪，皆無形之服也，而惟無形之心，即吾所謂善者之衣之耳。
4 Tzsy, pp. 107-108: 德者，積善於心而表諸身，從而稱善者也。人神本無裔無德，未著之素冊焉。既著而有字，既積乃有德矣。
The idea of the mind as *tabula rasa* comes from the *De Anima iii.iv* and was previously mentioned by Ricci in the chapter 7 of the *Tianzhu shiyi* (§ 437). Aristotle describes the idea of virtue as an art in *Nicomachean Ethics ii.i*. Vagnone explains that as the spirit commands the body and makes it move, virtue commands the spirit and makes it do the good (cf. p. 108). We can find similar expressions in the Coimbra commentary: «Virtue is an operative *habitus* of the good», and in the Summa Theologica: «It belongs to the nature of virtue to be an operative *habitus*».1 Vagnone insists that a virtuous man, like an artisan, needs training.

While Confucianism emphasizes moral innatism, Aristotelianism emphasizes moral acquisition. While the former consider goodness as innate, being the manifestation of the inner mind and of the moral order of the society and the cosmos, the latter consider goodness as being added to the mind. Ricci and Vagnone take the risky path of comparing these two different views in their Chinese works: they devaluate the concept of the «innate good» (*liangshan*) as being unable to establish a true ethics; by the same token they are devaluing the concept of the «innate knowledge» (*liangzhi* 良知), central in the thought of Mencius and later in the thought of Wang Yangming.

Perhaps as a way to defuse his rebuke of Chinese ethics, in the third chapter of *juan 5*, Vagnone mentions that he does not talk about «innate goodness» (*xingshan* 性善) but about «virtuous goodness» (*deshan* 德善). This may be a polite way to say that he does not wish to discuss «innate goodness» because it was a topic already extensively explored in the Chinese tradition, and instead chose to discuss «virtuous goodness». But how to reconcile two seemingly incompatible theories, with one considering goodness as originating from the original mind, while the other considers goodness as the result of practice and habits? Or did Vagnone suggest that his conception of goodness was in fact the true one or that the Confucian view was simply wrong?

This debate on the origin of virtues was not completely foreign to Confucianism. While up to this point mainstream Confucianism had followed the opinion of Mencius on the existence of innate virtues, the ancient Confucian thinker Xunzi (c. 313-238 BC) had claimed that morality is not grounded in human nature, but it is completely artificial and shaped the rituals. We do not know if Vagnone had read Xunzi, but even if he knew about him, he may have refrained from mentioning a theory that was not accepted in China at the time, being dominated by the School of the Mind.

**Differentiating Moral and Intellectual Virtues**

As we just saw, Vagnone introduced the difference between innate virtues and acquired virtues and asserted that acquired virtues are the core of the moral life. In the second chapter of *juan 6*, Vagnone explains the distinction between intellectual virtues (*lingde* 靈德, or *xiulingzhide* 修靈之德) and moral virtues (*xide* 習德, or *xiuxingzhide* 修行之德). The distinction between these two virtues is considered necessary; the former are based on the intellect and allow the person to understand the truth beyond the perceptions of the senses; the latter are based on the will and allow the person to act and do the good. The moral worth is not in knowing the good, but in doing it. And so the beauty of virtue lays chiefly on the will (cf. pp. 109-110).

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1 *ccen*, *Disputatio* vii, q. 1, art. 1, p. 60: «Virtus est habitus operativus boni»; *st i* 11*, q. 55, art. 2: «Et ideo de ratione virtutis humanae est quod sit habitus operativus».
In the chapter five of *juan* 6, Vagnone details the virtues. This chart shows the division of virtues, to which I have added the Latin and Greek equivalents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Virtue</th>
<th>Directed to pure knowledge</th>
<th>Directed to action</th>
<th>Intellect</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Wisdom</th>
<th>Xingshi</th>
<th>Yi</th>
<th>Practical wisdom</th>
<th>Temperance</th>
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<td>Virtue de 德 virtue arete</td>
<td>Six intellectual virtues lingde 靈德</td>
<td>Directed to pure knowledge 知以知者</td>
<td>Intelligence lingzhao 靈照 intellectus nous</td>
<td>Science jinghi 近知 scientia episteme</td>
<td>Wisdom zongzi 宗知 sapientia sophia</td>
<td>Xingshi 醒識 synderesis</td>
<td>Yi 藝 ars techné</td>
<td>Practical wisdom zhi 智 prudentia phronesis</td>
<td>Temperance lian 勁 temperentia</td>
<td>Courage yi 毅 fortitudo</td>
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I shall not detail here Vagnone’s account of intellectual virtues except that of «practical wisdom» (zhi 智) which Vagnone considers the most important for ethics. He mentions a list of three moral virtues that follows the Christian tradition and differs from Aristotle’s list. Vagnone explains the special status of practical wisdom regarding ethics: even though it is an intellectual virtue, as Aristotle asserts, it can also be considered a moral virtue because it leads the three powers of the soul (the concupiscent siai 司爱, the appetitive siyu 司欲, and the irascible sifen 司忿) that control the three moral virtues. In agreement with the Platonist-Stoic-Christian scheme, Vagnone affirms that there are a total of four «general virtues» (zongde 宗德), because they apply to every goodness and every virtue, and among the four, «practical wisdom» is the most important. Those four «general virtues» are simply the four cardinal virtues that are found originally in Plato’s *Republic*. Saint Ambrose later adopted them as representing the four moral virtues that Christian communities should follow. Aquinas later systematized the teaching of the four cardinal virtues. Clearly Vagnone presents a Christian version of the virtues, but because he does not present the theological virtues, those that are relative to God, this discussion remains within the scope of philosophical ethics. As I mentioned above, at that time in China the intellectual distinction between virtues dealing with theoretical knowledge and virtues dealing with morality did not exist. For example, the concept of principle (li 理) in Neo-confucianism has a moral bearing; Chinese tradition has usually considered the true and the good as strongly connected.

The last four *juan* of the *XiuShen xixue* discusses in detail each of the four moral virtues, but I shall only present and analyze here practical wisdom, which is the most important of them (*juan* 7). Vagnone translates the concept of practical wisdom with
the word of  *zhide* 智德, or virtue of wisdom. This word has a fascinating etymology: the character 智 *zhì* 智 as made of the character 知 *zhī* 知 for knowledge on the top of character 日 日 for sun, and there it means to observe 觀 (cf. p. 125). Interestingly, it seems that Vagnone is making a parallel between the etymology of the Chinese character 智 *zhì* 智 and the etymology of practical wisdom as it is known in Latin: *prudentia*, as deriving from *pro-videntia* or *pro-videre* (to foresee).¹ A definition of the concept *zhide* follows:

It is an intellectual virtue that shows the good and the evil in every affair. “Intellectual virtue” means that *zhide* resides in the intellect, follows the principles [of reason], rules the many acquired virtues, and does not allow any error in what is to be pursued or what is to be avoided. “Every affair” means that *zhide* deals wisely in directing every human action.²

This is consistent with the definitions found in the Coimbra commentary, the *Summa Theologica* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*.³ Vagnone states also that *zhide* deals with axioms (gonglun 公論) that can be applied in any circumstance, unlike the other virtues which have a specialized domain. Also, unlike the other intellectual virtues, which are purely about knowledge, *zhide* leads to action.

The second chapter of juan ⁷ discusses the question whether or not practical wisdom, or *zhide*, can lead to incorrect actions. It is affirmed that practical wisdom is not omnipotent, because if the appetitive power (siyu) and the will (aiyu) are not pure and tranquil, then it can easily become selfish and makes mistakes (cf. p. 129) The third and fifth chapters deal with the three *actus* of practical wisdom: counsel (jiyi 計議), judgment (jueduan 決斷) and command (mingling 命令).⁴ In the fourth chapter Vagnone distinguishes between different categories of practical wisdom; as applied to individual life, to family, and to country. Chapter six discusses the four integral parts necessary for practical wisdom: memory (ji, 記), understanding (da, 達), study (xue 學), shrewdness (jing 靜). The third chapter of juan ⁵ exposes the notion of the mean:

There are two middles in virtues. First, the virtues are surrounded by contrary evils, like courage stands in the middle between the two evils of fear and madness, or generosity between the two evils of avarice and extravagance. Second, the virtues are directed towards an object that agrees with principles and rules. Agreeing with rules means the middle; when one goes over the middle, it’s too long; when one does not reach it, it’s too short. And thus the virtues are directed towards an object which exists in the middle.⁵

As we can see from the Coimbra commentary, the first middle refers to the «medium quod objectum» and the second to the «medium quod essentiam».⁶ Vagnone explains fur-

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¹ Cf. Aquinas quoting Isidore of Seville: «Prudens dicitur quasi porro videns, perpicax enim est, et incertorum videt casus» *(ST II^a^ 11^e^, q. 47, a.1).*
² *XXX*, pp. 125-126: 從切義言之，乃人之靈德，每事指善，指惡者也。謂之靈德者，居靈才，從理，率眾習德，不令少誤於所當循、當避也。謂之每事者，因智專人各動之治也。
³ *CCEN*, Disputatio viii, q. 1, art. 1, p. 78: «Prudentia est habitus agendi vera cum ratione circa ea, quae homini bona, aut mala sunt». Cf. also *ST II^a^ 11^e^, q. 47, A.5; *EN* vi. v.
⁴ Cf. *NE* vi. ix-x.; *ST II^a^ 11^e^, q. 14, art. 1-3; *ST II^a^ 11^e^, q. 47, art. 8; *CCEN*, Disputatio viii, q. 2, a. 1, pp. 79-80.
⁵ *XXX*, pp. 111-112: 德之中有二。一，德左右相背之惡，勇毅居善，狂二惡之中，好施居吝，奢二惡之中也。一，德向之物，欲合理想，節理中也，適過之，長，不及之，短，則德向之物，亦自居中矣。
⁶ *CCEN*, Disputatio vii, q. 2, a. 1, pp. 63-64: «Omnis virtus moralis consistit in medio quod objectum… Omnes virtutes morales, excepta iustitia, consistunt in medio quod essentiam». Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* V. i; *ST II^a^ 11^e^, q. 64, art. 2 & *ST II^a^ 11^e^, q. 58, art. 9. This theory of a double medium such as presented by the Coimbra commentary is not an Aristotelian one.
ther that the first medium is not a rigid absolute, but should be determined taking into consideration the people, the time, the circumstances, etc. On the contrary, the second medium is arithmetical and it is not subject to discussion, like six being the medium between two and ten (cf. p. 112). The first medium is applied to moral virtues in general, but the second medium is applied to the virtue of justice, where an absolute fairness is required, and excess or deficiency cannot be tolerated, for example when repaying a debt. Vagnone mentions also that the medium cannot be applied to actions that are evil as such (cf. pp. 113-114).

Vagnone calls the medium with the Chinese notion of zhongyong, which can be literally translated as either the ordinary mean or the constant mean. In the Analects, Confucius says: «How perfect it is to have the zhongyong as virtue» (中庸之為德也, 其至矣乎). Later on, the disciples of Confucius restated the same idea and gave the name zhongyong to a chapter of the Book of Rituals, which eventually became one of the Four Books during the Song dynasty. One striking similarity between the Aristotelian meson and the Confucian zhongyong is that they both use the model of archery. Vagnone uses the metaphor of archery to discuss virtue, and it is something that any educated Chinese would have recognized as familiar, since this same metaphor is found in the Analects and the Mencius. However, as May Sim rightly notices, the zhongyong does not apply only to ethics, as Aristotle’s meson, but to everything under heaven, to the whole reality of the cosmos.

Magnanimity or Humility as Virtue

Juan 9 discusses the moral virtue of courage (yi 毅) and its four components of: magnanimity, or greatness of the soul (hongde 宏德), magnificence (hongshi 宏施), patience (hanren 賁忍) and perseverance (hengjiu 恆久). Aristotle did not make this classification, but it corresponds exactly, even listed in the same order, to the four parts of courage in the Summa Theologiae. The Xiushen xixue discusses magnanimity in more detail than the other three components. Aristotle sees magnanimity as an important virtue because the possession of this virtue indicates the presence of every other moral virtue in that person (cf. ne X.viii). Aristotle took the Athenian gentleman as the model of human excellence because, being powerful and rich, he could exert magnanimity toward the members of the lower classes. Thus, in this sense not everyone is able to exert all the virtues, but only the powerful man is able of magnanimity. On the contrary, Christianity sees power and richness as moral dangers and stresses the humility of the poor people. In this sense, for Christianity, humility is the truly universal virtue, since it does not depend on external conditions.

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1 Cf. cen, Disputatio vii, q. 2, a. 1, p. 63: «Quod etiam medium rei vocatur, est quod aeque ab utroque extremo, quo pacto senarius medius est inter denarium & binarium, quia totidem unitatibus ab utroque abest, nempe quattor». Also ne ii vi. 6.

2 Though there is only one explicit mention of archery in Aristotle, Yu Jiyuan has suggested that both Aristotle and Confucius applied to ethical life the model of a warrior or hunter, and so they both have used the same model of archery to discuss virtue. Cf. Yu Jiyuan, The Ethics of Confucius and Aristotle (New York, Routledge, 2007), p. 90. Though there is only one explicit mention of archery in Aristotle


4 However, scholastic writers have often mitigated the radicalism of the Gospels towards the rich people and accepted that they could be also virtuous. Especially, as Kraye remarked, «this virtue enjoyed a considerable vogue in the Renaissance, to some extent because it could be used as a suitably classical compliment when praising wealthy patrons such as Cosimo de Medici» (p. 332).
Vagnone describes magnanimity as a spiritual attitude. But while Aristotle sees social standing and wealth as necessary conditions to realize virtue, for Vagnone, power, fame and wealth are dangerous, and should therefore be despised (mie 萬). In order to fight their natural tendency for pettiness and avoid the traps of self glory, men must share and distribute their power with the lower classes. Going against Aristotle, Vagnone even wonders why this virtue could not be established independently from power. But, similarly as Aristotle (NE IV.iii), Vagnone calls magnanimity the ornament (wen 文) of all the virtues, and so this virtue is particularly beautiful (cf. p. 188). But Vagnone seems to be concerned that magnanimity comes only as the result of human efforts, and therefore, since humans are very limited, it is only when they receive the benediction and peace from God that they see worldly affairs as without great value and thus are able to resolve them (cf. pp. 189-190).

It is precisely because the virtue of magnanimity is important and at the same time problematic that Vagnone spends another chapter to list four vices associated to it: three by excess: presumption (qishi 自恃), vainglory (tangün 貧尊) and boasting (xukua 虚誇); and one by defect: pusillanimity (beilue 卑略).¹ He then mentions a virtue that is surely not Aristotelian but rather the Christian virtue par excellence, humility (qiande 謙德). He describes this virtue as follows: «Before doing something, to entrust it to God’s protection, without relying on oneself; after having done it, to return the merit to God, without assigning it to oneself».² Vagnone rhetorically asks who could say that magnanimity or humility could exist without the other.³

According to Aristotle, the magnanimous man remembers the gifts he gives to others but does not remember the gifts he has received. This may appear as a kind of ingratitude; Aquinas explains that the magnanimous man does not choose to forget the gifts received but this is a consequence of his natural disposition.⁴ Here again, Vagnone follows Christian ethics instead of Aristotelian when he deals with the virtue of justice in juan 10, placing gratitude (ganpei 感佩) among the nine virtues annexed to justice; this virtue is conspicuously absent from Aristotle’s discussion of justice.

In explaining the moral virtue of magnanimity, Vagnone clearly departed here from Aristotle and the moral values of the «proud Greeks», instead shifting it towards the Christian virtue of humility. But this move to emphasize humility certainly allows a rapprochement with Chinese culture. The Chinese sages are always humble, not necessarily in front of the personal God of Christianity, but in front of heaven. Even though humility is not specifically ranked among the Confucian virtues, Confucian commentaries on the Yijing paid a special attention to the hexagram associated with humility qian 謙.

**Conclusion**

Vagnone’s presentation of Aristotelian ethics to the Chinese had a dual purpose. First, he showed them that the West has a discourse on ethics as refined and sophisticated as the Chinese. Second, he presented an ethics that focuses on the present life, same as

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² *xxx*, p. 191: 未為之前, 任主佑, 任主己; 為之後, 任主功, 任自己。
³ *xxx*, pp. 193-194: 任謂謙無宏德, 宏德無謙乎?
⁵ *xxx*, p. 231.
Confucianism, but at the same time he prepares the ground for a discussion of moral theology.

It’s important to raise the question of how this work fits into the broader moral discourse that was taking place in China at the time. The reality is that we have little evidence to show whether or not this work influenced Chinese moral thought. In part this may be due to historical circumstances: a few years after its publication, the Ming dynasty was overthrown and in the political chaos before and after most of the literati who collaborated with Vagnone on this work died prematurely or disappeared from the scene. Despite the clear impact this political turmoil would have had on records that may provide insight to the reception of the work, we may suppose that collaborating on this work made sense for the literati who participated. Though they were not able, as we are today, to understand and appreciate how this ethical teaching developed in the West, they were eager to learn about this «Western learning on personal cultivation» as something that could enrich the ethical tradition of China. They surely did not believe that this intellectual teaching replaced their tradition but must have viewed it not as superfluous and redundant but rather as bringing new nuanced discourse to certain areas of their tradition.

We can understand the Xiushen xixue as an attempt to present a middle way between the two major schools of Confucianism, the School of Principle and the School of Mind. The School of Principle puts the emphasis on knowing the principles endowed by heaven that rule the cosmos, society, and human life. But during the Late Ming dynasty, it was felt that this knowledge was very theoretical, abstract, and not conducive to moral action, especially at the time when the Ming dynasty was collapsing. When they introduce Aristotelian ethics the Jesuit missionaries felt precisely this need to stress the importance of the will over the intellect. The Xiushen xixue insists on the intellect as the only basis of a true knowledge but also insists that intellectual virtues are not enough for moral action; thus ethical life should be an active and progressive shaping of moral virtues. The four moral virtues, especially practical wisdom, are the core of ethics. Through the use of practical wisdom, one can acquire and develop the three moral virtues of temperance, courage and justice.

In the other direction, the School of Mind puts the stress on innate knowledge and innate goodness. As the Zhongyong affirms: «What heaven has conferred is called nature; to follow nature is called the Dao; and to practice the Dao is called the teaching» (天命之謂性, 率性之謂道, 修道之謂教). This has led to moral intuitionism. During the Ming dynasty, the Taizhou school, a branch of the School of the Mind, developed moral intuitionism to an extreme degree. The Jesuit missionaries strongly criticized this moral intuitionism, which at the time was leading to extreme forms of moral subjectivism, and instead they emphasized the acquisition of moral virtues. I would therefore suggest that we understand the Xiushen xixue as an attempt to correct both the moral rationalism of the School of Principle and the moral intuitionism of the School of Mind. This suggests that the single greatest contribution of Aristotelian ethics to Confucian ethics is the notion of practical reason, because it is able to address issues present in both the School of Principle and the School of Mind.

1 The only work directly influenced by the Xiushen xixue is Han Lin’s Duoshu (The Book of the Warning Bell).
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