

**Sometimes, the Way to the Soul is through the Gut:
Aristotle, Confucius and the Role of Empathy in Moral Comprehension**

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ABSTRACT

Given mutually informative parallels between the ethical projects of Confucius and Aristotle, there are also promising possibilities for employing the Confucian concept of *shu* (empathetic understanding of others) to Aristotelian ethical pedagogy. The point of entry taken for this comparison lies in Aristotle's discussion of tragedy and its educational role as an affective imitation (a representation that provokes an emotional as well as an intellectual reaction). If the point of tragedy is to educate, first viscerally and then intellectually, on ethical matters, then the question this comparison seeks to answer is: how, exactly, is this accomplished? What insight does the Confucian concept of *xin* ("heart-mind") and the practice of empathetic moral analogy provide? Reading passages from Aristotle's *Poetics*, *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* with a Confucian eye provides a means for understanding in Aristotle the relationship between feeling and moral reason, for reconciling his situational ethic with the universal moral values he implicitly holds, and for applying an ostensibly self-directed virtue ethic to other-directed moral questions.