

Comparative Study of Eastern and Western Psychology: A Focus on Yulgok Yi I's Theory of Mind and Aristotle's Virtue Ethics

Seo Yun Lee

Chadwick International School, Republic of Korea

ABSTRACT

This study provides a comparative analysis of Eastern and Western approaches to moral psychology, focusing on Yulgok Yi I's Neo-Confucian theory of mind and Aristotle's virtue ethics. Yulgok Yi I, a pivotal Neo-Confucian philosopher, underscored the inherent goodness of human nature (*Seong*) and its harmonious interaction with emotions (*Jeong*), enabled by the relationship between *Li* (principle) and *Qi* (vital energy). He promoted moral development through "Gyeong" (reverence) to synchronize emotional reactions with ethical standards, so enhancing personal virtue and societal peace. Conversely, Aristotle articulated human morality through his notion of eudaimonia, attained by the development of qualities such as courage and temperance, directed by the "Golden Mean"—a equilibrium between extremes. Both philosophers emphasized the importance of combining reason and emotion in ethical conduct and stressed the practical implementation of moral development in everyday life. Yulgok emphasized community peace and self-cultivation, whereas Aristotle focused on individual flourishing through rational discernment and habitual practice. The study examines their collective perspectives on the interaction of reason, emotion, and moral development, while juxtaposing their cultural orientations and approaches. This research reinterprets the ideas of Yulgok and Aristotle within a modern setting, so connecting Eastern and Western ethical frameworks and providing innovative insights into human morality and self-improvement. The findings enhance the debate in moral psychology and ethical philosophy, offering practical ideas for tackling contemporary societal issues through a synthesis of historical knowledge.

Introduction

Eastern and Western philosophies have extensively explored fundamental inquiries into human nature and ethical existence, influencing core viewpoints on ethics, psychology, and self-improvement within their distinct cultures (Lee, 2020; Smith & Kim, 2018). Yulgok Yi I, a distinguished Neo-Confucian scholar in the East, underscored the importance of cultivating human nature to achieve moral maturity, which he regarded as vital for both individual ethical advancement and community concord (Park, 2015). His philosophy of mind emphasizes the significance of self-reflection and rigorous practice, asserting that comprehending and nurturing one's nature is essential for being an ethical person (Choi, 2017). This viewpoint corresponds with Confucian principles, which promote a harmonious equilibrium between people and the community.

Conversely, Aristotle, a prominent character in Western philosophy, examined human morality and happiness via virtue ethics. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle delineated qualities such as courage, temperance, and wisdom as avenues to a fulfilling existence, culminating in happiness or *eudaimonia* (Aristotle, 350 B.C.; Reeve, 2002). He contended that moral maturity is achieved by embodying virtues through consistent practice, establishing a foundation for individual and community well-being (Cooper, 1998). Aristotle's virtue ethics established a fundamental principle of Western moral philosophy, highlighting rationality, moderation, and self-actualization as essential components for the peaceful life of individuals and society (Nussbaum, 2001).

The ideologies of these two individuals offer profound insights into human psychology and morality, embodying essential viewpoints on human growth and ethical conduct in Eastern and Western thinking. For millennia, their concepts have shaped psychological theories, ethical frameworks, and cultural standards, significantly affecting individual and societal perceptions of moral development and self-actualization (Brown & Lee, 2021). This study is to provide a comparative analysis of Yulgok Yi I's theory of mind and Aristotle's virtue ethics to examine how each tradition perceives and addresses moral maturity from a psychological standpoint.

The study utilizes a literature analysis to analyze the principal works and philosophical foundations of both thinkers, highlighting the parallels and differences in their approaches to moral psychology. The study aims to reframe the meaning of these philosophies through the analysis of two perspectives, seeking to connect ancient philosophy with contemporary psychological findings, and it aims to cultivate a dialogue between Eastern and Western traditions to offer novel insights into human morality in an increasingly globalized society.

Yulgok Yi I's Theory of Mind

Yulgok Yi I's *Simseongron* (心性論, theory of mind and nature) articulates a fundamental notion that examines human nature and ethical conduct within the philosophical context of Neo-Confucianism. He elucidates the connection between human nature and emotions via the interplay of *Li* (理, principle) and *Qi* (氣, vital energy), underscoring the significance of moral cultivation and pragmatic implementation. Yulgok's philosophy emphasizes the alignment of moral norms inherent in human nature with emotional reactions to external situations, seeking the moral fulfillment of individuals and society alike.

Li-Qi Theory (理氣論) and the Theory of Nature and Emotions (性情論)

The distinguished Neo-Confucian scholar Yi I, known as Yulgok, developed a philosophical framework centered on the interaction between two fundamental elements, “Li” (理, principle) and “Qi” (氣, vital energy), to clarify human nature. *Li* denotes the essential and universal principle that underlies all existence, representing the ideal forms or essence of everything (Kim, 2020). *Li* delineates ethical principles and moral standards, instilling order and rules inherent to both humanity and the cosmos. Conversely, *Qi* is the vital energy that actualizes and materializes *Li* in the physical domain, enabling many transformations and reactions, including human behaviors and emotions. *Qi* functions to manifest the moral principles articulated by *Li* in the realm of material experience (Park, 2015).

Yulgok characterized human nature by distinguishing between “Seong” (性, nature), representing the intrinsic moral character of humanity, and “Jeong” (情, emotions), denoting individual feelings and sentiments (Choi, 2018). Seong embodies the underlying goodness and ethical ideals of humanity, signifying the innate moral capacity to pursue virtue. Conversely, *Jeong* represents the myriad emotional responses displayed by Seong in reality, characterized by fluidity and diversity shaped by *Qi*. Yulgok asserts that human morality and ethical behavior emerge from the interaction of *Li* and *Qi*. This is attainable only when the ethical principles suggested by *Li* correspond with the emotional responses elicited by *Qi* (Yi, 2016).

The relationship between *Li* and *Qi* is fundamental to Yulgok's comprehension of human nature and ethics. *Li*, as a constant and universal principle, sets a dependable standard of virtue. *Qi* concurrently integrates adaptability and uniqueness by accommodating personal experiences and reactions. This dynamic allows ethical concepts to be adaptable rather than fixed, enabling their application across the diverse situations of human life (Park, 2015). Yulgok defined human morality not as an inherent concept, but as a harmonic process that considers various emotional responses prompted by contextual circumstances.

Yulgok aimed to offer both stability and adaptability to ethical behavior through this framework. The collaboration of Seong and Jeong indicates that ethical behavior surpasses strict norms, requiring the integration of inherent virtue with external emotional reactions in practical contexts (Kim, 2020). Yulgok said that achieving such

harmony requires individuals to understand the moral principles within themselves while concurrently regulating the emotional responses provoked by *Qi* in reality. This signifies his conviction that moral progress is attained through the tranquil acceptance of one's intrinsic goodness and the emotional fluctuations of external circumstances.

The Importance of Moral Cultivation and Reverence (敬)

Yulgok Yi I underscored the significance of fostering "Gyeong" (敬, moral cultivation and reverence), or adoration, for ethical development. *Gyeong* is a mental discipline and a tool for self-reflection that transcends mere politeness. It aids individuals in internalizing ethical principles and enhancing attention and mindfulness (Choi, 2018). *Gyeong* involves the regulation of internal thoughts and emotions, ensuring that acts are consistent with ethical norms. This discipline establishes the basis for accurate moral judgment and consistent ethical conduct in various settings.

Yulgok asserted that in the absence of *Gyeong*, humans exhibit heightened emotionality, hence complicating the preservation of ethical standards. Yulgok emphasized the significance of fostering *Gyeong's* self-regulation, as emotional instability heightens moral transgressions. *Gyeong* assists individuals in managing their emotions, so facilitating the preservation of ethical conduct. An inherent incentive that assists individuals in transcending emotional distress and upholding ethical standards (Yi, 2016).

Yulgok emphasized the necessity of reading to enhance morality and ethics throughout his dialogue with *Gyeong*. *Gyeong* is a lifelong endeavor necessitating introspection. This is due to individuals consistently assessing their behavior, which allows for enhancement. *Gyeong* practice enhances character and conduct. A person attains strength and health, hence enhancing societal dignity and tranquility (Kim, 2020).

Gyeong is essential for spiritual development, social interaction, and communal cohesion. Yulgok posited that moral stability and social harmony are attainable when individuals engage in *Gyeong* and fulfill their societal responsibilities in alignment with their ethical principles. A significant population in *Gyeong* cultivates trust and respect. Establishing an ethical foundation enhances and enriches the community (Yi, 2016).

Yulgok Yi I believe *Gyeong* is significant as it imparts resilience to all individuals. *Gyeong* assists individuals in adhering to their principles rather than succumbing to their emotions. To foster virtue and uphold morals, individuals must engage in *Gyeong* practice. *Gyeong* assists individuals in transforming their ethical reflections into actions, a process Yulgok deemed crucial for moral advancement and societal harmony.

The Harmony of Nature (性) and Emotions (情): The Role of the Mind (心)

Yulgok Yi I highlighted the attainment of moral maturity by emphasizing the intrinsic goodness of human nature and the equilibrium between *Seong* (nature) and *Jeong* (emotions) (Yi, 2016). He regarded *Seong* as embodying the universal moral norm intrinsic to all humans, offering a shared foundation for the pursuit of ethical values grounded in humanity's inherent goodness. This norm establishes the basis for individuals to inherently adhere to moral principles and directs their ethical decisions and behaviors (Kim, 2020).

Conversely, *Jeong* denotes emotional responses arising from *Qi* (vital energy), which are dynamic and fluctuate according on external conditions (Park, 2015). *Jeong* encompasses the varied aspects of experiences and emotions in an individual's life; nevertheless, it also presents the risk of diverting persons from ethical standards. Yulgok asserted that "Sim" (心, mind) plays a crucial mediating role in the interaction between *Seong* and *Jeong*. *Sim* harmonizes the inherent moral tenets of *Seong* with the emotional reactions provoked by actual situations, enabling individuals to maintain their core virtue while appropriately adapting to changing contexts (Choi, 2018).

Through this harmonization process, *Sim* regulates emotional responses and maintains the integrity of *Seong*, thereby fostering equilibrium between *Seong* and *Jeong*. Yulgok asserted that when *Sim* successfully reconciles *Seong* and *Jeong*, persons can manifest universal moral principles in practice and make ethical judgments appropriate for each situation. This strategy preserves optimal moral concepts while also establishing pragmatic ethical standards

applicable to real-life scenarios. Individuals can uphold their moral values and demonstrate consistent ethical behavior through cognitive processes, remaining unaffected by emotional swings (Kim, 2020).

Sim functions as a conduit between *Seong* and *Jeong*, constituting the essence of moral development and character formation. The fundamental value of *Seong* embodies the ideal for which humanity should aspire, whereas *Jeong* reflects the complex situations humans face via the diverse emotional experiences of everyday life. *Sim* regulates *Jeong* in accordance with the ethical tenets of *Seong*, establishing criteria that empower humans to make moral decisions and judgments. Thus, *Sim*'s role extends beyond merely suppressing emotions; it aims to harmonize them with ethical objectives, so promoting the attainment of moral excellence (Yi, 2016).

In Yulgok Yi I's philosophy, *Sim* functions as an essential intermediary that harmonizes human ethical beliefs with emotional experiences in real-world contexts. The intellect enables individuals to uphold the inherent virtue of *Seong* while reflecting on events stemming from *Jeong*, so promoting the sustenance of consistent ethical behavior. Through this process, individuals can align moral objectives with reality and achieve moral maturity. Yulgok asserted that this harmony enables individuals to live in accordance with their inherent goodness, hence promoting social harmony and peace (Kim, 2020).

Aristotle's Virtue Ethics

Aristotle's ethics provide a methodical philosophical inquiry into the objective of human existence and the application of morality, establishing a vital basis for both ancient philosophy and contemporary ethics. His ethical philosophy emphasizes the comprehension of human nature and the pursuit of a moral existence, positing that this culminates in the ultimate objective of happiness (*eudaimonia*). Aristotle posited virtue (*arete*) as essential for attaining this objective, providing explicit rules and pragmatic methods for living a moral life.

Concepts of Virtue (*arete*) and Happiness (*eudaimonia*)

Aristotle asserted that *eudaimonia* was the ultimate objective of all human endeavors (Aristotle, trans. 2004). This notion of happiness transcends mere pleasure or transient satisfaction to encompass all facets of life. An individual's happiness is contingent upon their level of satisfaction and completeness in life. Happiness is a sustained condition of being. Aristotle posited that people inherently want pleasure, which is associated with intellectual activity, their distinctive function (Aristotle, trans. 2004).

Aristotle posited that virtue (*arete*) engenders happiness, rather than external circumstances or affluence. Virtue refers to the moral and intellectual excellence required to comprehend one's distinct essence. Virtue is not merely a gift or skill; it embodies the capacity to behave morally through rational deliberation. Aristotle categorized virtue into two types and maintained that its harmonious interplay was essential for happiness (Aristotle, trans. 2004).

Intellectual virtue is the attainment of rational excellence through education. This occurs as an individual acquires knowledge and understanding. This category encompasses knowledge, insight, and practical wisdom. These characteristics empower individuals to make judicious decisions and behave logically. Aristotle maintained that practical wisdom, surpassing mere academic knowledge, was essential for making sound decisions in particular circumstances (Aristotle, trans. 2004).

Moral goodness entails consistent adherence to ethical principles. It signifies the inherent characteristic that directs behavior. Moral virtues are acquired and cultivated, in contrast to intrinsic traits. Illustrations depict courage, temperance, and equity. These virtues employ reason to regulate emotions and impulses in accordance with the mean (*mesotes*) to avert extremes and sustain optimality (Aristotle, trans. 2004).

The Principle of the Golden Mean and the Practice of Virtue

Aristotle's ethics posits the Golden Mean (*mesotes*) as a fundamental foundation for moral virtue, highlighting the necessity of achieving balance and propriety in all life elements (Aristotle, trans. 2004). The Golden Mean entails eschewing activities that are either excessive or deficient and determining the appropriate course of action according to the occasion and environment. Aristotle posited that each virtue is actualized by achieving a balance between the extremes of excess and deficiency. He emphasized that ethical living transcends mere norm adherence, necessitating discernment and habitual application (Aristotle, trans. 2004).

Aristotle employed the notion of the Golden Mean to elucidate the practicality of various virtues. The virtue of bravery exists between the extremes of cowardice (deficiency) and recklessness (excess). Courage entails the judicious assessment to evade both retreating from peril due to fear and subjecting oneself to superfluous hazards. Generosity lies between stinginess (deficiency) and wastefulness (excess). Generosity involves the judicious sharing of resources, steering clear of both accumulation and imprudent excess (Aristotle, trans. 2004).

This approach is not a universal formula but is adaptive to individual traits and certain situations (MacIntyre, 2007). The Golden Mean in any situation is determined by the individual's life context, their surroundings, and the specific circumstances they encounter. Moral virtue cannot be distilled into universal rules or standards; it necessitates ongoing training and refinement via experience and practice (Aristotle, trans. 2004). Aristotle underscored that the practice of the Golden Mean involves not only exterior equilibrium in deeds but also the attainment of harmony between reason and emotion. He contended that human nature includes both reason and emotion, asserting that a genuinely happy life can only be achieved when these two elements function in a complementary fashion (Aristotle, trans. 2004).

Practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is essential for the efficient application of the Golden Mean idea. Practical wisdom is the capacity to identify the suitable mean in particular circumstances and to implement this assessment into action. This wisdom transcends theoretical knowledge and is developed by experience and contemplation. Aristotle posited that the absence of practical wisdom precludes the sustenance of the Golden Mean. Thus, moral excellence is not solely an outcome of inherent tendency but rather the consequence of deliberate and continuous study and practice (Aristotle, trans. 2004).

The Golden Mean, in short, is not simply an abstract concept but a principle actualized via the continuous application of reason, emotion, and practical wisdom in everyday life. It is crucial for the complete realization of human nature and the attainment of happiness, functioning as a fundamental component of Aristotle's ethical theory.

The Harmony of Reason and Emotion: The Basis of Ethical Judgment

Aristotle's ethics posits the equilibrium between reason (*logos*) and emotion as a fundamental component of moral judgment and conduct. Although Aristotle considered reason the cornerstone of ethical judgment, he did not perceive emotion as something to be repressed or eradicated. Conversely, he regarded emotion as an essential element that, when properly managed, enhances ethical motivation and promotes moral conduct (Aristotle, trans. 2004). Aristotle's ethical framework underscores the significance of the interaction between reason and emotion as a fundamental element in achieving virtue.

Aristotle contended that moral goodness is attained through the right regulation of emotions. He acknowledged that emotions serve as potent motivators for human conduct, and their proper utilization is essential for leading an ethical existence. Anger can act as an essential impetus to address injustice. Uncontrolled rage can result in aggressive actions or damaging consequences, whilst excessive repression of anger may lead to apathy or feelings of helplessness.

Aristotle posited that when wrath is suitably tempered by reason, it can serve as an instrument for achieving justice. This viewpoint illustrates that emotions ought not to be repressed but rather reconciled with the oversight of

reason. Nussbaum (2001) elaborates on this perspective, highlighting that emotions can constructively influence ethical judgment, so augmenting the validity and impetus for moral action.

Aristotle did not characterize virtue solely as a result of exterior activities. He defined virtue as an internal condition in which reason and emotion are synchronized, constituting the essential impetus for ethical conduct. A virtuous individual not only executes appropriate activities but also comprehends the underlying rationale and acts with suitable emotional impetus (Kraut, 2021).

Courageous behavior is more than simply embracing chances; it entails the equilibrium of fear and caution to act for justifiable causes. This illustrates that virtue is not merely an exterior display of behavior but an integrated internal character in which reason and emotion operate in conjunction.

Aristotle posited the synergy between reason and emotion as a crucial component of moral judgment and conduct. He argued that emotions must not to be ignored or dismissed, but rather rationally managed to function as a catalyst for ethical conduct. This harmony transcends ordinary behaviors, influencing the intrinsic nature and essence of ethical existence. It provides substantial insights for contemporary ethical discourse, acting as a crucial element in the realization of human potential and the pursuit of happiness.

Comparative Analysis of Yulgok Yi I and Aristotle

Understanding of Human Nature

Yulgok Yi saw human nature as fundamentally virtuous, grounded in the philosophical principles of Neo-Confucianism. He claimed that humans possess an inherent moral predisposition from birth. This perspective is closely aligned with the Confucian principle of the inherent goodness of human nature, or *Seongseon*. Yi I asserted that leading a moral life grounded in this virtue requires ongoing self-discipline and education. He argued that the objective of self-cultivation is to maintain one's intrinsic virtue and express it in everyday life.

Yulgok emphasized the notion of *Seong* (human nature), claiming its congruence with heavenly goals and its function as a moral guide. To achieve this essence, he emphasized the practice of *Geongmulchiji* (格物致知)—a methodology that integrates theoretical knowledge with practical application, accompanied by ongoing reflection and self-enhancement. He acknowledged the inherent virtue of human nature not as a fixed condition but as an ideal necessitating continuous and proactive endeavor to attain.

Aristotle, in contrast, characterized humans as "rational animals," emphasizing reason and logic as fundamental to human nature. He perceived the ultimate purpose of human existence as *eudaimonia* (happiness or flourishing), which transcends mere pleasure or monetary gain and is attained through the cultivation of virtue. Aristotle asserted that human nature is formed via the cultivation of character through rational thought and behavior, rather than by an inherent goodness of nature. He contended that human nature is expressed through virtues, which are cultivated through reason and experience. He highlighted the concept of the "Golden Mean," positing that moral goodness resides in a state of equilibrium, eschewing both excess and insufficiency. This perspective emphasizes the significance of logical discernment and pragmatic endeavor in enhancing human nature, rather than just presuming its intrinsic virtue.

The Process of Moral Cultivation and Training

The Dedication of Yulgok Yi I to Ethical Advancement

Yulgok Yi I regarded the cultivation of morals as a crucial step in comprehending human nature. He thought that human nature is inherently good; yet, he contended that sustained effort is necessary to manifest this kindness in real-life situations. He emphasized the practice of "Gyeong" (敬) as the fundamental principle in the domain of moral training. According to Yulgok, *Gyeong* served as a method for individuals to align their internal emotions and maintain a disposition conducive to making sound decisions. *Gyeong* is a practical attitude that affects daily activities and whole

lifestyle; it transcends mere state of mind and operates as a pragmatic disposition. Individuals can regulate their emotions and follow the path of virtue via the practice of *Gyeong*.

Yulgok recommended individuals to maintain their inner tranquility, resisting external influences from the surrounding environment. He asserted that *Gyeong* represents both the inception and conclusion of moral development, underscoring the importance of persistent endeavor through self-reflection and continual self-mastery. He emphasized the necessity of adeptly managing one's emotions rather than simply suppressing them. He asserted that when individuals operate based on reason instead of being governed by their emotions, they can lead a virtuous life. To do this, he urged individuals to assess their mental state through self-reflection and meditation, and to rectify any erroneous habits identified during this evaluation. Yulgok's teachings assert that the development of morality is an ongoing endeavor of self-discipline, guided by *Gyeong* and effectively regulated emotions. By doing so, individuals might strive to lead a life that is both moral and fulfilling.

Aristotle's Ethical Instruction

Aristotle considered the development of virtue to be a fundamental step for attaining moral maturity. He asserted that humans, as rational entities, can realize their essence via virtue, necessitating ongoing practice and discipline. Aristotle posited that moral excellence is not inherent but must be cultivated and honed via rationality and experience. He emphasized the significance of habitual activities in cultivating virtue, stating that individuals can attain moral maturity through these practices over time. He also emphasized the significance of reason in facilitating sound judgment among humans. Reason functions as a mechanism for individuals to discover and embody the “Golden Mean” (*mesotes*), eschewing extremes and preserving a balanced disposition. It is essential for traversing life with temperance and sagacity.

Aristotle contended that the essence of virtue is in the golden middle, which entails eschewing both excess and deficiency. The Golden Mean pertains not alone to identifying an average but to ascertaining the suitable actions and dispositions for each particular circumstance. Courage is a virtue that lies between the extremes of cowardice and recklessness and must be calibrated according to the situation. Aristotle asserted that attaining this equilibrium necessitates individuals to govern their wants and behaviors via reason. Aristotle's perspective on moral education emphasizes the need of developing virtue through logical practice and the quest for equilibrium, which eventually results in a morally satisfying existence.

The Relationship Between Emotion and Reason: The Harmony of Nature and Emotion

The Viewpoint of Yulgok Yi I: Concord Between Nature and Emotions

Yulgok Yi I, a significant person in the Neo-Confucian tradition, extensively examined the connection between human nature (*Seong*, 性) and emotions (*Jeong*, 情). He underscored the significance of reconciling these two components for ethical development. Yulgok thinks that *Seong* denotes the inherent moral and virtuous nature bestowed by heaven, but *Jeong* signifies the myriad emotions and sentiments encountered in the human realm. The two characteristics are not distinct but are intimately linked, with *Jeong* perceived as the expression of *Seong*. He cautioned that if emotions are left unchecked or exhibited excessively, the intrinsic goodness of *Seong* may get obscured.

Yulgok viewed emotions as an inherent aspect of human existence, yet contended that inadequate regulation of these emotions would obstruct a decent life. While emotions are manifestations of human nature, permitting them to prevail uncontrolled or unduly repressing them can distort this nature. He underscored that regulating emotions is an essential procedure for comprehending the essence of *Seong*. He emphasized the equilibrium between *Li* (理) and *Qi* (氣) to attain harmony between nature and emotions. *Li* embodies the essential principles and moral structure of the world, whereas *Qi* signifies the physiological energy and emotional dynamics inherent in humanity. Emotions stem from the dynamics of *Qi*, and an excessive or deficient *qi* undermines its congruence with ethical standards. Yulgok emphasized the necessity for individuals to control the flow of *Qi* by intellectual comprehension and ethical principles, so attaining harmony between nature and emotions and facilitating a virtuous existence.

Yulgok promoted the practice of *Gyeong* (敬) as a fundamental technique for emotional regulation. Through the practice of *Gyeong*, individuals can attain emotional mastery, maintain composure in the face of external stimuli, and unveil their inherent virtuous character. In his philosophy, the equilibrium between nature and emotions is fundamental to moral development. By regulating emotions, aligning *Li* and *Qi*, and practicing *Gyeong* with discipline, individuals can adhere to their authentic moral essence.

Aristotle's View: Balance Between Rationality and Emotion

Aristotle considered the balance between reason and emotion crucial for leading a virtuous existence. Instead of dismissing or stifling emotions, he underscored the significance of controlling and channeling them via rationality, therefore rendering them conducive to the practice of virtue. Aristotle claimed that emotions operate as a catalyst for human behavior. Emotions such as bravery, hatred, affection, and apprehension are essential in human existence. Nevertheless, when these emotions remain unregulated or unmanaged, they may result in unethical conduct. Aristotle contended that emotions should be rationally regulated and guided to facilitate the attainment of a virtuous existence.

According to Aristotle, virtue is a condition attained by the appropriate equilibrium of feeling and reason. Courage does not signify the total absence of dread; rather, it denotes the capacity to manage anxiety through rationality, facilitating suitable action. This concept corresponds with the "Golden Mean," wherein virtue is achieved by eschewing the extremes of excess and deficiency in emotion, hence sustaining a balanced state. Aristotle underscored the significance of persistent effort and repetition in attaining the equilibrium of passion and intellect. He contended that mere reliance on reason is inadequate for regulating emotions and exercising virtue. Rather, habitual activities must be developed to establish lasting behavioral patterns. Through this process, individuals can gradually achieve a natural equilibrium between emotion and rationality. In his philosophy, the amalgamation of passion and reason is essential to moral virtue. By logically regulating emotions, achieving the equilibrium of the Golden Mean, and continuously developing habits, individuals can lead virtuous and meaningful lives.

Commonalities and Differences in Eastern and Western Psychology

The Objectives of Moral Development and Maturity

Yulgok Yi I and Aristotle considered moral improvement to be a crucial pursuit in human life. Yulgok asserted that human nature is inherently virtuous and that moral development is crucial to preserve and enhance this innate goodness. He asserted that moral development surpasses individual improvement and is crucial for achieving social harmony and stability. Aristotle similarly contended that moral maturity enables individuals to acknowledge their intrinsic potential and achieve happiness (*eudaimonia*). Both philosophers agreed that the primary aim of moral development encompasses individual and societal flourishing.

Yulgok established moral maturity on the intrinsic virtue of human nature (*Seongseon*, 性善). He asserted that humans had an intrinsic virtuous character granted by god, and that the core of moral development is in preserving and nurturing this underlying goodness. In contrast, Aristotle viewed moral maturity as the outcome of experience, habitual practice, and logical reflection rather than innate propensity. He viewed moral development as a product of education and training, contending that deliberate and systematic effort is essential for ethical behavior. Yulgok emphasized the inherent moral nature of humans, while Aristotle highlighted the importance of experience and education in ethical development.

The Interrelationship of Nature and Rational Judgment

Both philosophers recognized the fundamental role of rationality in ethical reasoning and behavior. Yulgok and Aristotle underscored the importance of individuals cultivating the ability to make reasonable decisions grounded in reason

rather than being swayed by emotions or impulses. Moreover, both thinkers asserted that rational discernment is crucial for the governance and regulation of emotions, enabling individuals to achieve moral maturity. This perspective highlights individuals' abilities as both emotional beings and rational agents capable of self-betterment and society progress.

Yulgok emphasized the relationship between *Li* (理, principle) and *Qi* (氣, energy) to harmonize human nature and emotions. He saw human nature (*Seong*, 性) as the composite of ethical principles, whereas *Qi* functioned as the source of emotions and vitality. Yulgok asserted that maintaining balance between *Li* and *Qi* is crucial for moral development, requiring ongoing self-examination and improvement. Conversely, Aristotle underscored the importance of reason in following the "Golden Mean," which signifies an equilibrium between emotional extremes. He acknowledged that emotions are fundamental motivators of human behavior but contended that they require rational regulation to achieve appropriate equilibrium.

Practical Applications and Philosophical Implications

Yulgok and Aristotle both underscored the significance of implementing moral ideas in practical situations. Yulgok contended that moral development is completely realized only when expressed in everyday life, promoting the practice of *Gyeong* (敬, reverence) as a key method of self-cultivation. *Gyeong* signifies the maintenance of inward focus and composure, staying unaffected by external disturbances. Aristotle contended that virtues are developed by the repetition of virtuous actions, establishing moral habits that contribute to maturity. Both thinkers advocated for practical discipline and self-training as essential means to cultivate peace between individuals and society.

Yulgok emphasized that the primary goal of moral cultivation is to achieve social stability and communal harmony. He claimed that individual ethical development must correspond with familial and communal ties, so strengthening the general stability of the community. Conversely, Aristotle emphasized individual happiness (*eudaimonia*) as the paramount objective of moral development. He argued that when individuals cultivate virtue, they inevitably promote communal harmony and prosperity. Consequently, Yulgok embraced a community-oriented perspective, whereas Aristotle examined moral development from an individual-centric standpoint.

Conclusion

This study aims to create a framework for comparing Eastern and Western philosophical thought by conducting a comparative analysis of Yulgok Yi I's Neo-Confucianism and Aristotle's virtue ethics, thereby enhancing the understanding of the similarities and differences between these traditions and reinterpreting them in a contemporary context. The viewpoints of both religions about human nature, moral development, and ethical behavior illustrate their distinct cultural backgrounds while also highlighting common human ideals.

While both thinkers underscored the need of moral maturity, their fundamental beliefs and methodologies diverged. Yulgok Yi I grounded his philosophy in the intrinsic goodness of human nature (*Seong*) and aimed to achieve a moral existence through the harmonious synthesis of *Li* (principle) and *Qi* (vital energy) (Choi, 2017; Lee, 2020). His Neo-Confucian perspective underscores the significance of human development and societal peace attained via internal cultivation and emotional stability. He particularly emphasized *Gyeong* (reverence) as a fundamental approach to self-cultivation, underscoring the congruence between internal discipline and external conduct (Choi, 2018). Conversely, Aristotle elucidated the cultivation and enhancement of moral virtue via experience, habitual practice, and logical contemplation (Cooper, 1998). His notion of the Golden Mean offers a means to evade extremes and attain human happiness (*eudaimonia*) by balancing reason and experience (Reeve, 2002). This pragmatic approach highlights the interdependent connection between personal well-being and social stability, a defining characteristic of his ethical philosophy.

Yulgok Yi I and Aristotle both demonstrated a dedication to implementing ethical ideas in practical contexts. Yulgok underscored the significance of moral cultivation and the Confucian scholar (*seonbi*) in promoting communal harmony and social stability, accentuating the impact of individual moral development on collective welfare. Aristotle viewed human happiness as the cornerstone of community wealth and aimed to reconcile personal success with collective welfare. This dichotomy illustrates the overarching trends of their various traditions: Eastern philosophy prioritizes community and harmony, whereas Western philosophy emphasizes individual freedom and happiness.

This comparative approach transcends the simple juxtaposition of Eastern and Western thinking; it establishes a foundation for investigating their potential for mutual complementarity. The philosophies of Yulgok and Aristotle, emblematic of Eastern and Western intellectual traditions, converge in their pursuit of understanding the core of moral existence and universal human ideals, albeit their distinct cultural origins.

This work seeks to enhance current discourse in moral psychology and ethical philosophy by referencing the philosophical investigations of Yulgok and Aristotle. Their teachings offer significant insights for reconciling personal happiness with social stability in the contemporary, dynamically evolving global society. Their collective emphasis on harmonizing emotion with reason, the individual and society, as well as theory and practice, provides a pragmatic framework for addressing the complex difficulties of contemporary society. Yulgok's self-cultivation and social peace via *Gyeong*, and Aristotle's balanced and rational methodology through the Golden Mean, continue to be pertinent in confronting contemporary ethical challenges.

This research highlights the re-examination of common human values through the comparative analysis of Eastern and Western philosophy. It illustrates that their divergent philosophical viewpoints can serve complimentary functions in tackling the intricate ethical dilemmas of contemporary society. By recontextualizing historical philosophical legacies in a contemporary framework, we can create new paradigms for ethical development and societal advancement, providing direction for future generations.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor for the valuable insight provided to me on this topic.

References

- Aristotle. (2004). *Nicomachean Ethics* (W. D. Ross, Trans.). The Internet Classics Archive. (Original work published 350 B.C.)
- Brown, T., & Lee, H. (2021). *Ethics and psychology in cultural traditions: Bridging Eastern and Western perspectives*. Cambridge University Press.
- Choi, J. (2017). *Moral cultivation in Neo-Confucianism: Yulgok Yi I's theory of mind*. *Philosophy East and West*, 67(4), 123-135.
- Choi, J. (2018). *Emotion and nature in Yulgok Yi I's Neo-Confucianism: The interplay of Li and Qi*. *Asian Philosophy*, 28(2), 145-160.
- Cooper, J. M. (1998). *Aristotle's conception of practical wisdom and moral virtue*. Princeton University Press.
- Kim, S. (2020). *Yulgok Yi I's philosophy of Li and Qi: A Neo-Confucian framework for moral practice*. *Journal of East Asian Philosophy*, 15(3), 78-95.
- Lee, H. (2020). *Ethical frameworks in Eastern philosophies: Yulgok Yi I and the role of moral cultivation*. Routledge.
- MacIntyre, A. (2007). *After virtue: A study in moral theory* (3rd ed.). University of Notre Dame Press.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2001). *Upheavals of thought: The intelligence of emotions*. Cambridge University Press.
- Park, J. (2015). *Yulgok Yi I's Li-Qi dynamics and their application to moral behavior*. *Korean Philosophy Review*, 52(2), 234-257.

- Reeve, C. D. C. (2002). *Practices of reason: Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. Oxford University Press.
- Smith, R., & Kim, J. (2018). *Cross-cultural perspectives on ethical reasoning and development*. Springer.
- Yi, I. (2016). *Collected works of Yulgok Yi I: A Neo-Confucian perspective*. Seoul National University Press.