

Is Li Zehou's Free Will Free?: Classical Confucian Ethics and Relational Autonomy

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A small wave of scholars has in recent decades argued for the absence of a concept of free will in classical Confucian thought, identifying the lack of both 'freedom' and a faculty of will in early Confucianism. Li Zehou, in contrast, places free will at the center of his reading of classical Confucian ethics. Is this too interpretive? Does it do violence to the concept of free will, or to classical Confucian ethics? Could it even be un-Confucian? This paper defends Li's conception of free will as 'free' Confucian moral autonomy by considering how moral freedom exists within the relational, one-world cosmology of the classical Chinese worldview and the corresponding relational view of personhood.