

Xin 信 and the Importance of Attention

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“*Xin* 信”, which is usually translated as “trustworthy” or “keeping one’s promises”, is one of the key ethical qualities mentioned by Confucius in the *Analects*. In this paper, I attempt to offer an interpretation of Confucius’s notion of *xin* and use it as a basis to articulate Confucian insights on the role of attention in the exercise of certain ethical qualities. It will be argued that the attention that is involved in *xin* is of a special kind. Unlike some ethical qualities that require the agent to pay attention to and reflect on something within oneself (traits, desires, intentions etc.), and some that require the agent to pay attention to others and the circumstances that they are in, *xin* requires the agent to pay attention to whether there is a match between the kind of person she is (including traits, desires, intentions etc.) and the way she has led others to think that she is. In the first section, I analyze the usage of “*xin*” in the *Analects*. In the second section, I discuss how *xin* is different from contemporary understandings of trustworthiness. In the third section, I offer a positive account of *xin*. In the fourth section, I further articulate the insights the early Confucians have to offer on the role that attention plays in ethical cultivation.