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Introduction

THE SEATING ARRANGEMENTS for formal meals in Shandong province—the home of Confucian culture, with a population of nearly 100 million people—are rigidly hierarchical. The host with the highest social status sits at the "top" of a round table with a view of the door, the host with the second-highest social status sits at the other end of the table; the guest with the highest social status sits on the right-hand side of the host with the highest social status and next to the host with the third-highest social status; the guest with the second-highest social status sits on left side of the host with the highest social status and next to the host with the fourth-highest social status; the guest with the third-highest social status sits on the right side of the host with the second-highest social status and next to host with the fifth-highest social status; the guest with the fourth-highest social status sits on the left side of the host with the second-highest social status and next to the host with the sixth-highest social status. The other seats are randomly distributed among those with the least social status, with the number of randomly assigned seats depending on the number of hosts and guests. Sounds complex? The pictorial depiction of the social hierarchy in figure 1 might be helpful.[1]

What's wrong with Shandong's seating arrangements for formal meals? Nothing at all! The only thing wrong is the expectation that all social relations are supposed to be equal. As dean

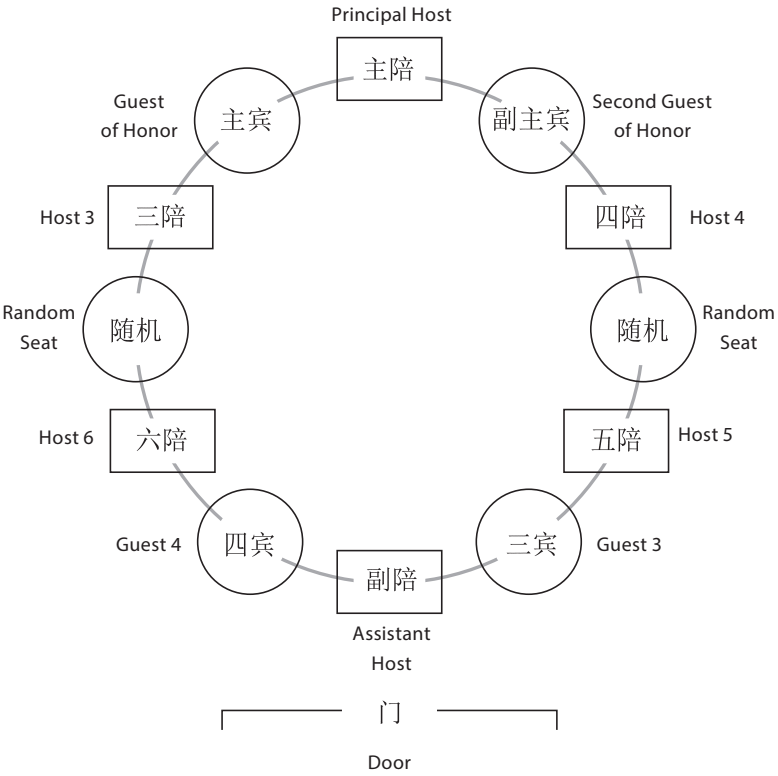

FIGURE 1. Seating hierarchy for dinner party.

at Shandong University's school of political science and public administration, Daniel has hosted countless meals with such seating arrangements, including hosting of foreign guests, and he has not once received any complaints. Perhaps his guests are too polite to complain. But we'd like to think that such seating arrangements are tolerated because they do not express and reinforce unjust hierarchies that rank people according to race or gender. People who are not ethnically Chinese—such as Daniel—are seated in the same position as ethnically Chinese people with the same social status (i.e., with a title of dean). Men

and women occupy their seats according to their social roles regardless of gender: For example, President Fan of Shandong University is female, and she occupies the principal host seat at formal meals, in the same position as previous (male) presidents at Shandong University. This is not to deny that patriarchal ways still inform the seating arrangements in rural parts of Shandong province—women often sit at different and less comfortable tables—but such norms are rejected in university settings.[2] The seating arrangements at Shandong University are also tolerated because the hierarchies are nearly invisible to the untrained eye. The tables are round, with the appearance of perfectly equal symmetry,[3] and the visiting guests won't know about the social hierarchies unless they are informed of the norms by local hosts. In contrast, the rectangular "high tables" at traditional Oxford and Cambridge universities are literally higher than tables for students, and students are not allowed to start eating until the teachers formally get the proceedings under way. Whatever the case for special treatment (better food and wine) for teachers and guests in university settings, Oxbridge-style "in your face" social hierarchies often generate a vague sense of unease even for beneficiaries of these arrangements.

But we'd like to defend a stronger claim. It's not just a matter of tolerating Shandong-style seating arrangements because they do not express unjust or visible hierarchies. These arrangements are endorsed, and even enjoyed, because they express several of the virtues of what we call "just hierarchies," that is, morally justified rankings of people or groups with respect to valued social dimensions. Consider the distribution of seats for persons of higher social status in Shandong. The usual "fight" among those in the know is to refuse a seat with more social prestige. So there is a toss and struggle, and finally the "loser" of the battle will give in and reluctantly take the seat that expresses a higher social

position. Most often, both sides know the outcome of the struggle—for example, the dean will take the seat of the principal host if he or she has the highest rank in the university hierarchy, the guest with the most academic prestige and/or the greatest number of years of physical existence (i.e., the oldest person) will take the seat of the guest of honor, and so on—but it would seem immodest to immediately claim one's "rightful" position (the foreigners who are ignorant of such rituals often take their assigned seats without putting up a struggle, but they are forgiven for their moral transgressions because they are not expected to know Shandong-style norms of civility). Put differently, the struggles, however hypocritical they may seem to the critical outsider, express Confucian-style virtues of humility and modesty.[4] Not only that, but the occupants of the seats with more social prestige have more responsibility. They must foot the bill: To be more precise, the assistant host must pay for the meal, but the funds come from the university (since the start of the anticorruption campaign in 2012, funds from public institutions do not cover alcohol, and often the principal host must bring the liquor at his or her own expense). The hosts are responsible for treating the guests well, and each host is supposed to take care of a particular guest corresponding to her or his hierarchical role. The hierarchical seating arrangement ensures not just that the most honored guest is treated well, but that the next three most socially important guests will also get some personal care. The hosts serve the others from communal dishes in the middle, starting with the principal host serving the most important guest on the right and then the second-most-important guest on the left, and then the assistant host does the same with the third-most-important guest on the right followed by the fourth-most-important guest on the left (foreigners might start serving themselves first, but again they are forgiven

for their moral transgressions on the grounds that they may not be familiar with Shandong-style norms of civility). Then the hosts must give repeated toasts to welcome the guests, anywhere from eight times in Qufu (ground zero for Confucian culture) to three toasts in other parts of Shandong province. The assistant host must then deliver some toasts (usually fewer in number than the toasts by the principal host), then the third-most-important host delivers some toasts (fewer in number than the toasts delivered by the assistant host), then the fourth-most-important host delivers some toasts (fewer in number than the toasts delivered by the third-most-important host), and so on. These toasts often express warm feelings of greeting and affection for the visitors, but ideally they are also accompanied by literate references to Chinese history and culture, leavened with some humor. When the "official" toasting is over, the occupants of the most prestigious seating positions must go around the table and individually toast and greet each visitor. From the perspective of shy or socially reticent people, these arrangements are more beneficial to the occupants in the less prestigious seats, who can enjoy the proceedings without any responsibilities. In any case, the formalities usually break down toward the end of the evening, with semi-inebriated participants roaming around the table almost at random, either joking or exchanging serious information that could not be shared with the whole group. Last but not least, the social hierarchies can shift on different occasions. If the same people (or a similar group) meet on different occasions, the roles may shift, with the guests playing the role of hosts, and vice versa, regardless of who has the most social status in society at large. And what counts as social status is not itself rigid: Sometimes it's age, sometimes it's government rank, sometimes it's academic achievement, sometimes it's perceived level of virtue, and so on.

In this sense, the social hierarchies are not fixed and can shift depending on the context. If the visiting professor is the guest, then he or she may occupy the guest of honor seating position, even if he or she does not have the highest social status outside of the university context. So yes, Shandong-style seating and drinking rituals are hierarchical, but what's wrong if they provide hospitality for the guests and generate a sense of harmony among participants? Perhaps such hierarchies are morally justified if they shift over time and if those with more social power end up caring about the needs of those with less power and eventually do more to serve their interests? Not to mention that these hierarchical rituals are often aesthetically pleasing (the food is usually varied and delicious) and thoroughly enjoyable for the participants . . .

As an ideal, we defend hierarchical Shandong-style seating arrangements, but in practice they often have a downside. Most worrisome, there is often a fine line between semi-inebriation and total (if not fatal) inebriation.[5] Surely it's no coincidence that Shandong province has the highest per capita consumption of alcohol in mainland China (Shanghai, perhaps the most Westernized and socially egalitarian part of China, is among the lowest).[6] But there are social mechanisms that have the effect of moderating alcohol consumption: It is the highest form of rudeness to serve oneself alcohol and to drink alone in a group setting (it is similar in Confucian-influenced Korea; in the West, the first toast is often communal, but then people often serve themselves and drink without toasting others). And there is usually accommodation for those who do not drink alcohol: Their glasses are filled with water, which looks like fiery "white" alcohol (白酒), and they can join participants in group toasts without drinking alcohol. That said, we need to recognize that the social pressure to drink alcohol may not always be welcome.

Lower-ranking people often find it hard to refuse the toasts of their superiors, even if they have exceeded their "normal" levels of inebriation. Even higher-ranking people might feel unwelcome pressure to drink, as a way of showing authority over lower-ranking people or to impress guests. And guests themselves often feel unwelcome pressure to drink.[7] Chinese women who typically drink far less than men may feel somewhat alienated from the drinking rituals.[8] And sometimes the people from China's more socially egalitarian southern provinces find that Shandong-style rituals, even when they work well according to modernized social norms, are not as desirable as they might be. It may be true that universities in Shandong have shed the most egregious patriarchal norms, but there is no serious effort to honor women or recognize their special contribution to society. In Zhejiang, by contrast, the wives and children of invited guests are sometimes asked to sit in the principal guest of honor position: As a child, Pei recalls being honored as the principal guest in banquets with her parents and family friends, a practice that would be nearly inconceivable in Shandong. That said, it doesn't follow that Shandong people should shed hierarchical seating arrangements and hierarchical drinking and eating rituals. The task is to modernize the hierarchical rituals according to progressive social values while maintaining the advantages that make them so enjoyable, if not morally uplifting, for the participants.

The example of Shandong-style seating arrangements is meant to shed light on our theoretical concerns. Let's now turn directly to those concerns. Equality is clearly an important value—recognized and endorsed by social and political progressives in the modern world—and much has been written on the ideal and practice of equality as well as the need to equalize relations between ethnic groups, genders, and classes. We generally share these egalitarian outlooks and concerns. But hierarchy, arguably,

is equally important, and research on hierarchy has lagged behind. All complex and large-scale societies need to be organized along certain hierarchies, but the concept of hierarchy has become almost taboo in politically progressive circles. This is a huge mistake. It is important to think about which forms of hierarchy are justified and how they can be made compatible with egalitarian goals. We need to distinguish between just and unjust forms of hierarchy and think of ways to promote the good forms and minimize the influence of bad forms. But what exactly do we mean by "hierarchy" and why does it matter today? What do we mean by "bad hierarchies" that worry people with politically progressive sensibilities? Most challenging from a theoretical perspective—and the main question we try to answer in this book—is, which forms of hierarchy are morally justified today and how can they be promoted in the future?

1. What's Wrong with Hierarchy?

In a purely descriptive sense, a hierarchy is a relation that is characterized by (a) difference and (b) ranking according to some attribute. Social hierarchies tend to have a normative dimension: They are social systems in which there is "an implicit or explicit rank of individuals or groups with respect to a valued social dimension."[9] But we need further normative justification to argue that societies *should* value those dimensions. In English, the word "hierarchy" has come to have pejorative connotations because we now think that most traditional ways of ranking people or groups are not justified from a moral point of view.

Biologists tend to speak of hierarchy in the neutral sense, and they study its origin and evolution without passing any moral judgments.[10] Hierarchy is a ubiquitous organizing principle in biology and a key reason evolution produces complex, evolvable

organisms. Why did hierarchy evolve? At the level of biological neural networks, the key factor is the cost of connections: According to an influential study by computer simulation, networks without a connection cost do not evolve to be hierarchical, whereas those with a connection cost evolve to be hierarchical, and such networks exhibit higher overall performance and adapt faster to new environments.[11] Put simply, with a degree of centralization in connection-making, complex biological systems need fewer connections and things can run more efficiently. A similar mechanism seems to explain the evolution of hierarchy in larger-scale social organizations. As Peter Turchin explains, "The only way that large human groups can arrive at a common course of action is by [hierarchically] structuring interpersonal connections. . . . Societies that were larger and better organized outcompeted smaller and more shambolic ones. Hierarchical organization was one of the cultural traits that was heavily favored by the new selection regime in the Holocene [which started roughly 12,000 years ago with the end of the ice age]. . . . It's a pipe dream to imagine that a large-scale society (e.g., a million or more—a small nation by today's standards!) can be organized in a nonhierarchical, horizontal way. Hierarchy (in a neutral sense) is the only way to organize large-scale societies."[12] Just as it's impossible to efficiently connect large numbers of neural networks without hierarchy, so it's impossible to connect large numbers of people in an efficient way without a hierarchically structured social organization. In short, efficiency is a clear benefit of hierarchy.

The efficiency of hierarchy may help to explain why we like hierarchies at some unconscious level. According to one study, an abstract diagram representing hierarchy was memorized more quickly than a diagram representing equality, and the faster processing led the participants to prefer the hierarchy diagram.

And participants found it easier to make decisions about a company that was hierarchical and thus thought the hierarchical organization had more positive qualities.[13] Whatever the negative feelings about hierarchy at the conscious level, it seems that the efficiency benefits of hierarchy in our evolutionary history often prompt us to like hierarchy.[14] But efficiency *per se* is not morally justified. It depends on the ends being pursued. The Nazis built superefficient concentration camps, but they were put to use for despicable purposes. Or consider the workings of natural selection. To an important extent, we are what we are because of natural selection. The mission of natural selection is to get genes into the next generation in an efficient way, and we tend to like what's helpful for this purpose and dislike what's not. As Robert Wright puts it, "We were 'designed' by natural selection to do certain things that helped our ancestors get their genes into the next generation—things like eating, having sex, earning the esteem of other people, and outdoing rivals."[15] But we can decide that doing some of the things that made us effective gene propagators in the past are no longer desirable today. Evolution may have prompted us to value our own interests above those of others, but the costs of excessive self-regard may now outweigh the benefits. For example, natural selection designed human minds to size people up in a way that would lead to interactions that benefited the genes of the humans doing the sizing up, not to size people up accurately. Hence we tend to exaggerate the virtues of our friends and the vices of our enemies. That may be efficient for purposes of reproduction, but it also provides the psychological roots for tribalism and demonization of the "other." Upon reflection, we can decide that the social and political consequences of tribalism and warfare threaten our species, if not the whole world. If we agree that it's better to let go of things like lust and conceit and ill-will that were "programmed"

into us to perpetuate our genes in an effective way, then we can promote practices such as meditation that promote compassion for all sentient beings and help to erode the psychological roots of what we now consider to be immoral behavior.[16] It may well turn out that what's efficient from the point of view of natural selection is morally wrong, and we can and should strive to challenge much of what seems "natural." In the same vein, there are good reasons to challenge many of the social hierarchies that seem natural to us. These hierarchies may have arisen for reasons of efficiency, but we need not endorse them from a moral point of view. This is not pure theory: Upon reflection, it seems obvious that many of the hierarchies from the past are morally problematic today. As historian Yuval Noah Harari puts it, "complex human societies seem to require imagined hierarchies and unjust discrimination. . . . Time and again people have created order in their societies by classifying the population into imagined categories, such as superiors, commoners, and slaves; whites and blacks; patricians and plebians; Brahmins and Shudras; or rich and poor. These categories have regulated relations between millions of humans by making some people legally, politically or socially superior to others."[17] But we have made moral progress: Today, most educated people recognize and condemn the seemingly "natural" hierarchies of our past history.[18] Most Americans, for example, now endorse statements about equality and reject statements about the value of hierarchy[19] and complain that hierarchies are inhumane, immoral, and undemocratic.[20]

Why do we now reject most traditional hierarchies? A key reason, arguably, is our unhappy experience with morally bad hierarchies in the form of racism, sexism, and caste-like distinctions between people. Few if any progressive and educated people living in modern societies defend hierarchies among classes of humans who are inherently superior or inferior based on noble

birth, race, sex, or religion, although such hierarchies were commonly endorsed in the past.[21] In ancient Rome, the penalty for assault on a slave was half the penalty for assault on a free man,[22] but today slavery is (fortunately) regarded as morally obscene. Ancient Chinese thinkers argued that scholar officials should be exempt from criminal punishment,[23] but no contemporary Confucian seeks to revive such forms of inequality before the law. At some level, then, we are all egalitarians who endorse the principle of equality of basic moral and legal status for citizens. And with the possible exception of crazed terrorists, we all endorse the view that human beings, regardless of background, are equally entitled to what Michael Walzer terms "thin" human rights: rights not to be tortured, enslaved, murdered, and subject to systematic racial discrimination.[24] But we—the coauthors of this book—do more than endorse equality before the law in criminal cases and basic human rights. Our book is informed by what we might call a "progressive conservative" perspective. On the one hand, we are sympathetic to the traditional egalitarian causes of the political left, including an aversion to extremes of wealth distribution, more rights for the productive classes, more support for poor countries that unduly suffer the effects of global warming, equality between men and women, as well as equal rights for same-sex couples. In our view, many of the social hierarchies traditionally viewed as natural and just are neither natural nor just, and we can and should challenge those hierarchies: by revolutionary means, if necessary. On the other hand, we share a conservative attachment to, if not reverence for, tradition, and we recognize that some traditional hierarchies—among family members, citizens, states, humans and animals, and humans and machines—are morally defensible. We do not argue for blindly reaffirming and implementing hierarchies that

may have worked in the past. But suitably reformed—so we will argue—they can be appropriate for the modern world.

2. In Defense of Hierarchy

Whatever the drawbacks of traditional forms of hierarchy, the effort to combat all forms of hierarchy is neither possible nor desirable. Complex organizations and societies need some form of hierarchy and will outcompete and outlast those that seek to abolish all forms of hierarchy. History bears out this prediction: Efforts to consciously build large-scale organizations or societies without hierarchies have failed miserably. Edmund Burke famously criticized the French revolutionaries for seeking to equalize relations of command and obedience in the military and predicted such efforts would lead to the rise of "some popular general, who understands the art of conciliating the soldiery, and who possesses the true spirit of command, [and who would] draw the eyes of men upon himself [and become] the master of the whole republic."[25] In China's Cultural Revolution, the effort to stamp out social hierarchies similarly led to mass violence and populist tyranny. In contemporary China, the populist legacies of the Cultural Revolution still poison the political atmosphere, aided by the internet that allows anonymous masses to hound social undesirables into submission. In the United States, the populist backlashes against elites empower strongmen such as Donald Trump with scant regard and respect for traditional constraints on political power. So the effort to combat all forms of hierarchy will not only fail; it may lead to something even worse from a moral point of view.

In short, the choice today is not between a society with no hierarchies and one with hierarchies, but rather between a

society with unjust hierarchies that perpetuate unjust power structures and one with just hierarchies that serve morally desirable purposes. Perhaps the idea of just or morally justified hierarchies seems difficult to digest at the conscious level, especially from a modern perspective. We have suggested that Shandong-style hierarchical seating arrangements can be morally justified for formal dinner occasions, but other examples readily come to mind. We generally take hierarchies of esteem for granted: Nobody doubts that LeBron James deserves his trophy as the Most Valuable Player in the 2016 NBA playoffs by virtue of his achievements on the basketball court. And whatever the disputes about the moral worthiness of particular Nobel Peace Prize winners, few object to the principle that we can and should reward those with great moral achievements of some sort. In China, the government honors adults who are filial to their elderly parents; we can argue about the choices, but it seems hard to object to the principle of honoring those who can set a good model for others.[26] What's more controversial is the claim that morally justifiable social hierarchies should structure our social lives on an everyday basis, including our relations with loved ones. That's the claim we'd like to defend in this book.

Our target is the view that all social relations should be equal. The flip side of this view is that unequal relations are fundamentally unjust: As Jean-Jacques Rousseau lamented in his *Confessions*, "I felt, more than ever, from repeated experiences, that associations on unequal terms are always to the disadvantage of the weaker party."[27] So those who care about the interests of the weak—that is, all sensitive, progressive-minded people—should affirm the ideal of equal social relations at all times in all walks of (social) life. In the contemporary world, this ideal is often expressed in everyday (English language) speech: Think

of nine-year-olds who want to be treated as equals.[28] More surprising, perhaps, the blanket defense of social equality is increasingly defended by sophisticated political theorists. In the first few decades after the publication of John Rawls's groundbreaking book *A Theory of Justice* (1971), Western political theorists were mainly concerned about the nature of things to be distributed equally (is it income, resources, welfare, capabilities, or something else?) and debates about the most defensible egalitarian distributive principle (should it be pure equality, the difference principle, sufficiency, or something else?).[29] More recently, some theorists—let's call them "social egalitarians"—argued that this focus on distributive principles is too narrow and neglects the broader agendas of actual egalitarian political movements. As Elizabeth Anderson put it, "What has happened to the concerns of the politically oppressed? What about inequalities of race, gender, class, and caste?"[30] Nor did political theorists obsessed with the just distribution of privately appropriated goods, such as income, or privately enjoyed goods, such as welfare, pay attention to the concerns of gay and lesbian people who seek the right to get married and the disabled who seek access to reconfigured public spaces and campaign against demeaning stereotypes. To remedy the problem, social egalitarians argue that equality should refer first and foremost to an egalitarian ideal of social relations: Various goods should be distributed in order to secure a society in which people are related as equals. The focus on social inequality allows political theorists to critique the unjust social hierarchies that have plagued and continue to plague human societies, "including slavery, serfdom, debt peonage, feudalism, monarchy, oligarchy, caste and class inequality, racism, patriarchy, colonialism, and stigmatization based on sexuality, disability, and bodily appearance."[31] So far, so good. As political progressives, we welcome this focus on

social relations and applaud the critique of the unjust social hierarchies that have oppressed and stigmatized the large majority of people in history.[32] But it doesn't follow that equal social relations are necessarily just and that hierarchical social relations are necessarily unjust. As Joseph Chan explains, one could argue that traditional hierarchies "are problematic not because they undermine equality, but because they deprive people in the lower ranks of such hierarchies of the opportunities to pursue wellbeing and develop virtue, and they do so on ascriptive grounds that are morally irrelevant and hence unfair. Rejection of these hierarchies may not necessarily lead to endorsement of equal social relationships or rejection of other hierarchies. One could imagine hierarchies that are relatively free from the ills of these historical examples and capable of promoting the wellbeing and virtue of the lower ranked."[33] We'd like to add that not all historical hierarchies are necessarily unjust. We should be open to the possibility that some traditional forms of hierarchy were morally justified and they can serve as inspiration for thinking about just hierarchy in the modern world.

But which hierarchical relations are justified and why? In our view, it depends on the nature of the social relations and the social context. As a method, we are inspired by Michael Walzer's call for a pluralistic approach to justice.[34] There is no one principle of justice appropriate for all times and places. Our main argument is that different hierarchical principles ought to govern different kinds of social relations: What justifies hierarchy among intimates is different from what justifies hierarchy among citizens; what justifies hierarchy among citizens is different from what justifies hierarchy among countries; what justifies hierarchy among countries is different from what justifies hierarchies between humans and animals; and what justifies hierarchies

between humans and animals is different from what justifies hierarchies between humans and (intelligent) machines. The sum total of our argument is that morally justified hierarchies can and should govern different spheres of our social lives, though these hierarchies will be very different from the unjust hierarchies that have governed much of our lives in the past. We support our arguments with a broad range of philosophical arguments and historical examples from different cultural traditions, as well as with extensive social scientific evidence and anecdotes from our personal experience. But we freely concede that our arguments are ultimately supported by the considered moral and political intuitions of readers sympathetic to our progressive conservative outlook. We have neither the desire nor the ability to persuade terrorists, white supremacists, antifeminists, misanthropes, narrow nationalists, warmongers, China-bashers, religious fundamentalists, climate-change deniers, die-hard conservatives, homophobes, and human carnivores with no moral qualms. Nor can we persuade leftists who dogmatically assert the value of equality in all realms of social life. Our hope is that progressive conservative thinkers will come to see the merits of just hierarchical relations in different kinds of social relations, not just because they are philosophically defensible, but also because they can help us think about solutions to the leading political challenges of our day.

We develop our argument in five separate chapters that correspond to five different forms of social relations and five different corresponding principles of hierarchy. These five hierarchical social relations are not meant to be exclusive, but they can and should govern much of our social lives. Chapter 1 focuses on relations between intimates that are characterized by emotions of love and care based on prolonged experience with face-to-face interaction. Much political theorizing, both in the West

and (less so) in China, idealizes friendship between equals as the most desirable form of social relation. We do not dispute the desirability of friendship between equals, but we argue that an even higher form of social relation would include shifting hierarchies between intimates. Of course, hierarchies should not include violence, nor should they be fixed for eternity. But shifting hierarchies between lovers and family members are not just tolerable; they add much to the color and humor of social interaction. Even hierarchical relations between employers and housekeepers can be morally justified if they allow for role changes over time, though it might take a generation for such reversals to occur. Contemporary political theory does not provide the intellectual resources to develop our arguments on morally justifiable hierarchies between intimates, so we seek intellectual inspiration from ancient Chinese, Indian, and Greek thinkers.

In chapter 2, we turn to a discussion of just hierarchies between citizens—mainly strangers to one another—in modern large-scale political communities. It is a special challenge to justify hierarchies in political systems without voting mechanisms that (equally) empower citizens to change their rulers every few years. We argue that hierarchies between rulers and ruled in such communities are justified if the political system selects and promotes public officials with above-average ability and a willingness to serve the political community over and above their own private and family interests. We have the Chinese political context in mind, and we argue that this kind of ideal—what we call "political meritocracy"—helped to inspire the imperial political system in China's past and Chinese political reformers in the early twentieth century, and may help to justify the political system in China today. However, the meritocratic system needs to be accompanied by democratic mechanisms short of competitive elections at the top that allow citizens to show that they

trust their rulers and provide a measure of accountability at different levels of government. In the Chinese context, however, there is a large gap between the ideal and the reality, and we argue that a judicious mixture of Confucian-style "soft power" combined with democratic openness, Maoist-style mass line, and Daoist-style skepticism about the whole political system can help to reinvigorate political meritocracy in China.

Chapter 3 discusses relations between states. Whereas relations between rulers and citizens in countries should be characterized first and foremost by actions that benefit the citizens, relations between countries need to be mutually beneficial for both countries. Notwithstanding lip service paid to the ideal of equality between sovereign states in the modern world, we argue that hierarchy between powerful and weaker states is the norm in international relations. Such hierarchical relations can be justified if they benefit both powerful and weaker states. We draw on a mixture of philosophy and history to argue that justifiable hierarchical relations can be characterized by either weak reciprocity—with both countries deriving instrumental benefits from hierarchical relations—or strong reciprocity—with decision makers in stronger and weaker states thinking of their relations from the perspective of both states, not just from the perspective of their own state. Strong reciprocity is more difficult to achieve, but it is more stable and long lasting than weak reciprocity. In terms of the future, we argue that an ideal of "one world, two hierarchical systems" may be appropriate for future forms of global order. Here too, modern theorizing is not sufficient, and we draw on the insights of ancient Indian and Chinese thinkers to make our points.

In chapter 4, we consider our relations with the animal kingdom. Throughout much of human history, most cultural and religious traditions—with some notable exceptions, such as

Daoism—have valued humans over animals. We argue that it is morally justifiable to posit a moral hierarchy with humans on top, but only if accompanied by the principle that humans should not be cruel to animals. But the principle of "subordination without cruelty" is not sufficient to spell out the kinds of obligations we owe to animals. We have different kinds of relations with different animals, and we owe the strongest obligations of care to animals with human-like traits and that contribute most to our well-being. In the case of animals bred for human consumption, we argue that such subordination is only justified if the animals are bred in humane conditions that are exceptionally rare in the modern world. We owe least to ugly animals that harm humans, but the principle of subordination without cruelty applies even in the case of the nastiest animals.

In chapter 5, we turn to perhaps the greatest challenge of our times: the need to maintain dominance over increasingly intelligent machines. We argue that machines can and should serve human interests—in that sense, they should be our slaves—and it is important to maintain such hierarchical relations of dominance. Here Marxism provides intellectual inspiration: The ideal of higher communism, with artificially intelligent machines doing socially necessary labor and humans freed to realize their creative essences, may be feasible several decades from now. But the state cannot and should not "wither away": A strong state will always be necessary to ensure that artificial intelligence does not invert the human-machine relation with humans on top and machines on the bottom. But worrisome science-fiction scenarios, with machines that seek to make humans into slaves, are challenges for the long term. In the short to medium term, we argue that Confucianism can help us to think of how to meet the challenge of artificial intelligence so that machines continue to serve human purposes.

The online appendix to our book is a joint statement—a kind of manifesto—signed by different political thinkers (including Daniel) in defense of the ideal of just hierarchy (https://press.princeton.edu/titles/30674.html). It is the product of a Berggruen Institute workshop on equality and hierarchy at Stanford University and was penned primarily by Julian Baggini. The manifesto helped to inspire this book (the detailed arguments were inspired mainly by conversations between Pei and Daniel over the past few years), and it also shows that there is potentially wide support for the ideal of just hierarchy in the modern world among people willing to question the received prejudice that social hierarchy is always a bad thing.

3. From China to the World

We expect that our defense of "just hierarchy" will resonate with the considered political intuitions of readers who share our progressive conservative perspective, with the implication that traditional hierarchies, properly reformed and updated for modern societies, can serve progressive political goals. But we recognize that the progressive conservative perspective may sound paradoxical to Western readers.[35] How can one be committed to both traditional values rooted in the past and to progressive values that point to a different (and better) way of doing things in the future? The mainstream narrative of modernity in Western societies is that traditional hierarchies expressed and institutionalized unjust values such as racism, sexism, and aristocratic privilege. Modern enlightened thinkers criticized traditional hierarchies and put forward strong arguments in favor of social equality and individual freedom that set the moral standard for future progress. There remains a large gap between the ideal and the reality, but hardly anybody openly argues for a return to the

bad old days of rule by white men from aristocratic families. The default moral position, in the eyes of most Westerners, is a commitment to social equality and deep skepticism of the value of traditional hierarchies.

In China, it's a different (hi)story. Early Confucian thinkers criticized rulers on the grounds that they oppressed and impoverished ordinary people. In this sense they were political progressives. But rather than invoking new or future-oriented values as a moral standard for criticizing present-day injustices, they invoked standards from a golden age in the past that expressed morally desirable hierarchies in a harmonious society. The self-declared First Emperor of China, inspired mainly by Legalist ideas, implemented harsh policies that destroyed aristocratic privilege and built up a complex bureaucracy that expressed a commitment to social mobility based on merit. Subsequent imperial history was largely informed by Confucian commitments to both traditional social hierarchies and proto-socialist political ideals such as poverty reduction, equality of opportunity, and infrastructure projects designed to benefit the large majority of people. The imperial system broke down in 1911, and Western-influenced intellectuals blamed Confucian-style hierarchies for China's backwardness.[36] The tradition of antitraditionalism culminated in the Cultural Revolution, a disastrous attempt to abolish all forms of hierarchy from social life. Today, it is widely recognized by both government officials and leading intellectuals that China's way forward needs to draw on both conservative and progressive values: The default moral position often favors social hierarchy, and the question is how to make those hierarchies serve socially and politically progressive goals. In terms of our book, it means that our arguments in favor of morally justified social hierarchy might find a more ready audience in China and

other East Asian societies influenced by Chinese culture such as Korea, Vietnam, and Japan.[37]

Needless to say, this somewhat crude sketch contrasting dominant political values of East Asia and the West overlooks important countercurrents.[38] But the default moral positions for or against social hierarchy continue to have great influence today. In Sweden, children often address all adults by their first (given) names,[39] the kind of lesson in social equality that would be inconceivable in China, not to mention societies such as Japan and South Korea that institutionalize social inequality by means of practices such as bowing at differential angles depending on a person's age and social status. In China, the supposedly egalitarian ideals of communism became transmuted into hierarchical social forms without much controversy: Even three-member party cells of the Chinese Communist Party are expected to appoint a leader in the form of a party secretary.[40] It would not be a gross simplification to assert that the norm of social equality has become the default moral position in almost all Western societies, which may not be the case in China and other Confucian-influenced East Asian societies. That's not to say Western societies have eliminated the need for hierarchy, but it takes a different form. In the United States, people feel valued by being treated as social equals, but the expression of superior status (and power) takes the form of wealth. It is fine to address Bill Gates by his first name, but it is also fine for the rich to separate themselves from the poor by means of living in gated communities. Libertarian arguments in defense of stark material inequality may be widely shared in the United States, but such views have almost no resonance in East Asian societies governed by hierarchical rituals that express differences in social status. Perhaps powerful members of East Asian societies need not rely

on material wealth to show their superiority to the same extent.[41] It seems that the powerful members of almost all complex societies need to express some form of hierarchy, and the choice comes down to Western-style economic hierarchy with a commitment to social equality versus East Asian–style social inequality with a commitment to economic equality.[42] Such cultural differences are expressed in different languages: Although the most common word for hierarchy (*dengji* 等级) in Chinese is nearly as pejorative as the word "hierarchy" in English, it is easier to talk about morally justified social hierarchies in Chinese because the language has words such as *chaxu* (差序) that more readily lend themselves to the idea that not all social hierarchies are bad.[43] These differences are learned and reinforced in different childhood educational practices[44] and express different cognitive orientations.[45] Perhaps the cultural differences are most evident in the political sphere, and we do not expect that our arguments in favor of political meritocracy (chapter 2) or a China-led political hierarchy of states in East Asia (chapter 3) or for a strong Communist Party with the power to combat malevolent artificial intelligence (chapter 5) will have much persuasive power outside of China.

Cultural differences also matter when it comes to prioritizing different principles of hierarchy that inform different social spheres. Even if we agree that we can usefully posit the existence of different spheres informed by different principles of social hierarchy, we cannot assume that all these principles can be simultaneously implemented in some sort of harmonious way. That is, the successful implementation of a principle of hierarchy in one social sphere might conflict with, or undermine, the successful implementation of a principle of hierarchy in another sphere. It is entirely possible, for example, that a commitment to serving citizens by meritocratically selected rulers in a strong

state (chapter 2) may conflict with the need to promote ties of strong reciprocity with weaker states (see chapter 3) since citizens of the stronger state may not be willing to share benefits with citizens of a weaker state. Even more worrisome, the commitment to ward off the potential challenge of "machine-masters" (chapter 5) may undermine the need for more democratic checks on the power of the state (chapter 2). In this case, which principle should have priority? Chinese thinkers steeped in a tradition of concern for *tianxia* ("All-under-heaven") may argue that the first principle should have ultimate priority because our very existence is at stake. But Americans are far less likely to accept the potential cost of a totalitarian state that leaves hardly any space for personal privacy or intimacy. If the license plate slogan in New Hampshire—LIVE FREE OR DIE—expresses a widely held view in that part of the world, then we do need to take seriously the question of how to prioritize the different hierarchical principles in cases of conflict, with potentially different rankings in different social contexts.

In short, we usually have the Chinese political context in mind. Some of our ideas may seem strange, if not morally outrageous, to people in societies far removed from the influence of Chinese culture. Our ideas originate *from* China: We support our arguments mainly (but not exclusively) with references to China's history and philosophical traditions such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, and stories from our personal experience living and working in China. And we write *for* China: We try to provide a coherent and rationally defensible account of the leading social and political ideas of China's public culture that can be used to critically evaluate the political reality in China. We do not mean to imply that our ideas only have validity in China. But what we say in favor of hierarchy needs to overcome a higher cultural hurdle in Western societies that strongly favor

social equality in all spheres of social life. We hope that Western readers with a strong commitment to social equality will learn from this book if they seek to better understand China, but we do not expect that Western readers will be persuaded by many (or any) of our China-centered arguments.

That said, we do not entirely forsake the aspiration to universality. Default positions in favor of social equality are difficult to change, but they are not fixed for eternity. The field of business studies provides some evidence that biases in favor of social equality can be changed if need be: Managers from Western societies that value social equality can perform well if they adapt to the preference for social hierarchy in East Asian workplaces.[46] Nor is it hard to imagine political scenarios that allow for the implementation of morally justified hierarchies. In democratic countries, citizens are likely to become disillusioned with populist leaders who fail to deliver on extravagant promises ("Mexico will pay for the wall"), and there will be political pressure for meritocratic checks on populist excesses. So which parts of our book may seem more plausible, if not politically influential, to readers outside of China? Readers who share our progressive conservative perspective—an attachment to tradition and to progressive political causes—may more readily accept our fivefold division between the forms of morally justified hierarchies that inform different forms of social relations. The idea that different hierarchical principles should inform different social spheres—what works in the family may not work at the level of the state; what works between citizens may not work between states; what works between states may not work between human and animals; and what works between human and animals may not work between humans and machines—may resonate with the considered intuitions of people in all modern complex societies that allow for different forms of social hierarchy.

One important caveat: We do not mean to claim that there are completely separate principles justifying different kinds of social relations and that they all fit together in some seamless whole. For one thing, there may be social relations not discussed in depth in our book, such as the relation between employer and employee, teacher and student, commander and soldier, or religious leader and follower, that are informed by different principles of social hierarchy or that overlap with the principles discussed in this book. Social relations are not Platonic-like social spheres endowed with mystical autonomy: The social reality is far more complex in people's minds. Even if we agree, for example, with the argument (in chapter 1) that hierarchical relations between intimates are justified if they involve shifting roles, we might also agree that the principle invoked (in chapter 2) to justify hierarchies between rulers and citizens—those with power must care for those with less power—also applies to the relation between parents and children. Or else we might agree that the principle invoked (in chapter 3) to justify hierarchies between states—the relations should be mutually beneficial for both the powerful and the weaker parties—could also be invoked to justify our relations with pets (see chapter 4). The boundaries between social spheres and underlying hierarchical principles, in other words, are fluid. At best, we might be prepared to defend the claim that we identify different principles that *primarily* justify five different kinds of social relations in different social spheres in modern complex societies, but we do not mean to imply that those principles are exclusive or that the boundaries between social spheres are air-tight.

One final methodological point. We do not draw exclusively from Chinese history or philosophy to make our arguments. Our approach is closer to what Stephen Angle terms "rooted global philosophy: that is, taking one's own philosophical tradition as

a point of departure, but being open to stimulus from other philosophical frameworks as one strives to make progress (as progress is measured from one's own, current vantage point)."[47] So we draw on ancient Greek and Indian philosophy and contemporary French and Anglophone philosophy, as well as social science studies and the history of societies outside of East Asia, if they help to strengthen our arguments. As a general rule, the more we draw on international intellectual resources, the more exportable our arguments. What we say about shifting roles that justify "nighttime hierarchies" (chapter 1) or the hierarchical principle of "subordination with care" that justifies our relations with domesticated animals (chapter 4) draw heavily on intellectual resources outside the Chinese context and may have more persuasive power at the global level.

To summarize, our arguments are mainly rooted in the Chinese context and will have more persuasive power in that context. But the progressive conservative perspective is not absent from modern societies outside of China, and some of our arguments in favor of morally justified hierarchies and the boundaries between them may also persuade readers in those societies. At the end of the day, it's up to the reader to decide which arguments are persuasive and which ones aren't. There is one universal value that we wholeheartedly endorse: the need to read with a critical eye. We encourage readers to always ask themselves what's wrong with our arguments and to think how they can be improved (or rejected). Our book is preliminary—to be more positive, it is the first systematic exploration of just hierarchies in modern societies—and we look forward to critical comments that will allow somebody else to write a better book on the topic. ☺

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