

## **Resentment and Forgiveness in Confucian Thought<sup>1</sup>**

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### I

In this paper, I discuss a certain way of understanding resentment and forgiveness found in contemporary philosophical discussions. It understands resentment in terms of the notion of self-respect, and forgiveness in terms of the forswearing of resentment.<sup>2</sup> I will show that, while there are concepts akin to those of resentment and anger in early China, there is no concept close to that of forgiveness. Forgiveness is not idealized in Confucian thought, and an examination of why this is so helps highlight a certain ethical outlook distinctive of the Confucian tradition.

Let us consider the nature of our response to a situation in which one party (the victim) is treated by another (the offender) in a way that we regard as inappropriate in relation to certain norms that we endorse. This can be a matter of actual tangible injury or just disrespectful treatment. When the victim is neither me myself nor someone related to me in some special way, I might still condemn the action and be moved to intervene, and might also be emotionally engaged with the situation because I care about the norms that have been violated. Following usual practice, I will refer to a response of this kind as “indignation”.

If the victim is related to me in some special way, such as being a family member, there might be additional elements to my response. I might feel a special obligation to intervene in ways that go beyond what I might be obligated to do when the victim is a stranger, and my emotional engagement with the situation might take on a more intense and complex form because of my special concern for the victim. Differentiation in our responses due to the differential relations we stand to the victim is part of the human condition and is something recognized, and actually advocated, by the Confucians.

Consider now a situation in which the victim is me myself. Following the same line of thought, an enhanced sense of urgency to intervene and a more intense and complex emotional engagement with the situation might result from the more intimate relation I stand to the victim, who happens to be me myself. I am more intimately affected by the injury and am in a better position to take corrective action as well as being more motivated to so act. This difference in my response results from the differential relation I stand to the victim and, as such, does not yet constitute the response of resentment. On the view of resentment under consideration, resentment has to do with an additional element to my response that goes beyond what is generated by this

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<sup>1</sup> The discussion of this paper continues that in my “On Anger – An Experimental Essay in Confucian Moral Psychology.” It shifts the focus to the notions of resentment and forgiveness, and explicitly relates the Confucian position to contemporary philosophical discussions.

<sup>2</sup> This view can be found in a number of recent writings, including Murphy and Novitz.

differential relation. This additional element involves my responding not just to the tangible injury that resulted, but also to the attitude of the offender toward me.

Now, even when the victim is a stranger, I might also respond in a certain way to the attitude of the offender to the victim. My response will be different depending on whether I believe the offence to be accidental or deliberate, or whether the offence is primarily an act of self-interest or of malice. So, even when I myself am the victim, I will also be responding to the attitude of the offender in this manner, and perhaps in a more involved way simply as a matter of the differential relation I stand to the victim. The notion of resentment is supposed to describe an element in my response that goes beyond this. It is supposed to involve a certain special perspective that I take toward the offender by virtue of being the victim, a perspective that I would not have had if the victim were a stranger.

This special perspective takes the following form. I see myself as being treated with disregard or even contempt by the offender, and feel injured by this attitude in a way that goes beyond the tangible injury that has resulted from the treatment. I see myself as being the target of the offender who views me in a way that is less than what I deserve and who communicates the corresponding message through the ill-treatment. I feel insulted and treated with contempt, and I am moved to correct not just the tangible injury that has taken place, but also this attitude of the offender.<sup>3</sup> My perspective is focused in a special way on the offender, whom I view as less than decent, as someone with whom I cannot enter into or maintain a positive relationship. Because resentment is focused on the offender in this special way, it has adverse implications for the relationship between me and the offender. It can also lead to additional postures I take toward the offender, such as vengeful sentiments, hatred, or malice.

On the view under consideration, my responding with resentment shows that I care about not just the norms by which the offending action is measured, but the values in my own person. Resentment is in defense of such values and so is protective of self-respect. Even though some of its offshoots, such as vengeful sentiments and hatred, might be problematic, resentment in itself is not. To respond with resentment is a good thing, since a failure to respond with resentment shows that one is lacking in self-respect.<sup>4</sup>

Forgiveness keeps resentment within proper bounds, and ultimately involves the foreswearing of resentment altogether.<sup>5</sup> It is primarily a change of the heart, and is compatible with my continuing to take appropriate action against the offender, such as insisting on proper compensation.<sup>6</sup> It involves a fundamental change in the way I view and feel about the offender, thereby restoring the relationship I stand to him.<sup>7</sup> The offender is, after all, decent and someone

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<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Murphy, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Murphy, pp. 16, 18 and Novitz, p. 301.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Murphy, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Murphy, pp. 33-34.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Murphy, pp. 16-17.

with whom I can enter into or maintain a positive relationship. But forgiveness should take place only under the right circumstances, such as when the offender has repented, since forgiving too readily would also show that one lacks the proper degree of self-respect.<sup>8</sup>

There are different opinions on the origin of this view of forgiveness. Some believe that it can be traced to Bishop Butler, while others have argued that what Butler advocated is the moderation rather than the total abandoning of resentment.<sup>9</sup> Some believe that this view of forgiveness is a Judaeo-Christian conception, while others have argued that it can already be found in Greco-Roman culture though forgiveness is not idealized in such a culture.<sup>10</sup> Whatever its origin, this view of resentment and forgiveness has provided a framework within which related topics have been discussed, such as the circumstances under which forgiveness is appropriate and whether there is a desirable form of unconditional forgiveness.

What I will do in the remainder of this paper is to explore why, while there are concepts akin to resentment and anger in China and while the Confucians do recognize the phenomenon of resentment, the concept of forgiveness is not developed nor idealized in Confucian thought. In Section 2, I will discuss terms in early China that are akin to the notions of resentment and anger. In Section 3, I will show that there are no terms akin to the notion of forgiveness after discussing a number of possibilities. The notion of forgiveness is not developed in Confucian thought because the Confucians reject two assumptions that underlie the contemporary view. I consider these two assumptions in Sections 4 and 5 and discuss the alternative views of the Confucians. In Section 6, I conclude with a brief discussion of the fundamental difference between the Confucian outlook and the contemporary view.

## II

The term closest to “resentment” in early China is *yuan* 怨, and there are other terms with connotations ranging from displeasure to anger, such as *yun* 愠, *nu* 怒, and *fen* 忿. In addition, corresponding to the ideas of insult and disgrace, which are often mentioned in the contemporary explication of the notion of resentment, there are terms such as *wu* 侮 and *ru* 辱. The attitude toward *ru* 辱 is *chi* 耻, a term that is also related to *nu* 怒. In my analysis of these terms, I draw primarily on the *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan*, *Guoyu*, *Lunyu* and *Mengzi*. Where appropriate, I also

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<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Murphy, p. 17 and Novitz, pp. 313-314.

<sup>9</sup> Murphy attributes this view to Butler (p.15), while Griswold argues that Butler views forgiveness in terms of the moderation of resentment and foreswearing of revenge, but not the foreswearing of resentment as such (pp. 20, 36).

<sup>10</sup> Novitz thinks that this is the traditional Judaeo-Christian view of forgiveness (pp. 299-304), while Griswold argues that this notion of forgiveness is already present in Greco-Roman culture though not viewed as a virtue (pp. 1-2, 8-14).

supplement the analysis with reference to other early texts such as *Shijing*, *Mozi*, *Xunzi*, *Hanfeizi*, *Lushichunqiu*, and *Liji*.

*Yuan* 怨 refers to the ill feeling between states (*Mengzi* 1A:7), which can be carried over from a former ruler to the present ruler so that one can speak of the *yuan* coming from the past (*jiu yuan* 舊怨) or the *yuan* of the former ruler (*xian jun zhi yuan* 先君之怨). The state to which such *yuan* is directed can also seek to ‘repair’ the situation (*xiu jiu yuan* 脩舊怨; *xiu xian jun zhi yuan* 脩先君之怨) (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B1.4, B12.1, B12.6). A state can also deliberately cause *yuan* between two other states as part of a political strategy, so that it can take advantage of the animosity between these two states to gain the political upper hand (*Guoyu* 4.44).

More typically, *yuan* is used in relation to an individual, in which case it is a state of the heart/mind (*yuan xin* 怨心) (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B10.13). Such a state can be directed against a specific party who has caused one dissatisfaction, in which case *yuan* is used transitively (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B5.15, B8.7). What causes dissatisfaction can be a variety of things, such as being made to work hard (*Lunyu* 4.18; *Mengzi* 5A:1), being distanced (*Lunyu* 17.25), being passed over when offices are assigned (*Mengzi* 2A:9, 5B:1), having someone placed above oneself inappropriately (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B8.16; *Guoyu* 1.24), or being denied what one has sought (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B5.15). Just like the ill-feeling between states, one’s *yuan* toward another person can persist from the past (*jiu yuan* 舊怨), and one can seek to ‘respond’ to what has caused one *yuan* (*bao yuan* 報怨) (*Guoyu* 4.39, 6.18; cf. *Lunyu* 5.23).

*Yuan* can persist over time unless addressed and can be hidden and harbored (*Mengzi* 5A:3). One can even hide one’s *yuan* while befriending the person to whom one’s *yuan* is directed (*Lunyu* 5.25). On the other hand, one’s *yuan* can also be outwardly manifested. One typical manifestation is in the form of complaining words (*yuan yan* 怨言) (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B5.24; *Guoyu* 4.39; *Lunyu* 14.9). There are many occurrences of *yuan* where it is not specified whether *yuan* is outwardly expressed, but even if not, *yuan* is still a complaining state of the heart/mind having to do with one’s not being well treated or not getting what one wants (*Lunyu* 12.2; *Mengzi* 1B:5, 1B:11, 3B:5, 7B:4).

The outward manifestations of *yuan* can take on a more aggressive form, such as one’s slandering the offending party (*Mozi* 2.2; *Xunzi* 2.2a). One might exploit one’s official position to punish the offending party inappropriately (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B10.5), and one’s *yuan* can even lead to killing when one is in a position to do so (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B8.7). Thus, *yuan* in its extreme form can involve profound animosity toward the offending party and very aggressive action. For this reason, *yuan* is also paired with terms that connote deep dislike (*wu* 惡) (*Mozi* 3.1), hatred (*hen* 恨) (*Guoyu* 1.30; *Mozi* 4.2) and animosity (*chou* 讎) (*Guoyu* 4.15; *Mozi* 3.2, 13.1).

Because *yuan* can lead to animosity and aggressive action, it is usually viewed negatively in early texts. It is often presented as *si* 私, that is, centered on oneself in an objectionable manner (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B10.5). The self-centeredness of *yuan* is contrasted with a kind of impartiality (*gong* 公) that characterizes what is proper or appropriate, a contrast put in terms of

self-centered *yuan* (*si yuan* 私怨) as opposed to impartial righteousness (*gong yi* 公義) (*Mozi* 2.1). *Yuan* is also described as small or insignificant (*xiao* 小), such small or insignificant *yuan* (*xiao yuan* 小怨) being contrasted with large and significant *de* (*da de* 大德) (*Shijing* no. 201; *Guoyu* 1.15, 7.1).

These contrasts show that *yuan* is viewed as focused on oneself in a way that leads to a petty-mindedness. This view of *yuan* is also conveyed through the contrast of *yuan* with other qualities that are usually well-regarded, such as *kuan* 寬, a kind of broad-mindedness (*Xunzi* 8.2b), *hui* 惠, benefits or favors to others (*Guoyu* 4.25), *shi* 施, giving to others (*Chunqiu Zuo zhuan* B5.28), as well as with *de* 德, being generous and kind toward others (*Chunqiu Zuo zhuan* B8.3; *Guoyu* 4.33, 6.18).

*De*, often translated as “virtue” or “power”, has a charismatic effect on those benefitted, the latter feeling a compulsion to respond in a positive manner.<sup>11</sup> As such, it has a pre-emptive effect on *yuan*, and similar comments are made in early texts about *hui* 惠, benefits or favors to others – those treated with *de* or *hui* will not respond with *yuan* (*Guoyu* 1.12). Their effect can work backward – one can use *hui* to remove *yuan* that is already in place (*Guoyu* 4.71). This thought probably lies behind a proposal put to Confucius – to use *de* to respond to *yuan* – that Confucius rejects (*Lunyu* 14.34). The reverse phenomenon – to use *yuan* to respond to *de* – is also presented in the *Guoyu* (1.15) as something that should not happen.

Although *yuan* is usually directed toward specific individuals who has caused one dissatisfaction, it can also be a response to one’s dire circumstances as such, without being directed to anyone in particular (*Lunyu* 14.10). If directed to anything at all, then this complaining state of the heart/mind is directed to, so to speak, ‘the world’; in early texts, this is put in terms of *yuan* being directed to Heaven (*tian* 天) or to people in general (*ren* 人) (*Lunyu* 14.35; *Mengzi* 2B:13; *Xunzi* 2.8). And *yuan* can also be directed toward oneself, as when one regrets one’s own past behavior that one now realizes is inappropriate (*Mengzi* 5A:6).

This last observation highlights the point that *yuan* is based on some evaluative assessment going beyond the judgment that someone has brought about a situation that one would prefer otherwise. In directing *yuan* toward oneself, one judges now that one had acted inappropriately in the past. In directing *yuan* toward another person, one judges not only that the other person has brought about some situation that one prefers otherwise, but also that what has happened is in some way not proper or not justified; at least, there is a lingering question as to why this should have been done to oneself. And in directing *yuan* in general toward ‘the world’, not only does one prefer one’s circumstances to be different, but one also regards one’s being in such circumstances as undeserved, and questions why this should have happened to oneself.

It follows that, even when one finds oneself in a situation that one would prefer otherwise, *yuan* would not arise if one can understand and agree with the reason why the situation has come about. One would not *yuan* even if made to work hard if one sees that it is appropriate for one to be assigned the task (*Lunyu* 20.2). However little one may receive, one

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the use of *de* in early texts, see my *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, pp. 15, 21-23.

would not *yuan* if one sees that the resources are evenly and fairly distributed (*Guoyu* 1.14). And one would not *yuan* even if killed if one sees that this is done for good reason (*Mengzi* 7A:12, 7A:13).

To sum up, *yuan* refers to ill feeling between states in a political context, and to a complaining state of the heart/mind in an individual triggered by some situation that negatively affects oneself and that one finds unjustified, undeserved, or at least unclear why it should have happened to oneself. It can be directed at someone who is viewed as responsible for bringing about the situation, or can just be a complaining state not directed at any particular individual. It can stay in the heart/mind and persist over time unless the situation is addressed, and it can be hidden and submerged. But it can also be outwardly manifested as verbal complaints or more aggressive action against the person to whom it is directed. In its more aggressive form, it is associated with hatred and animosity. *Yuan* is generally presented in early texts as an undesirable state of the heart/mind; it is self-centered, narrow-minded, and often focused on things of lesser significance.

Let us now consider another term *nu* 怒, often translated as “anger”. *Nu* pertains to the heart/mind (*Guoyu* 5.1) and it is also triggered by situations that one prefer to be otherwise. It is contrasted with *xi* 喜, which is triggered by situations that one welcomes (*Guoyu* 4.17; *Xunzi* 13.5a, 14.1b, 14.2b). *Nu* can be triggered by situations that one views as directed against oneself, such as being slandered (*Guoyu* 1.3, 6.7). But it can also be triggered by situations that displeases without implying that one is being improperly treated (*Mengzi* 1B:9). So, *nu* differs from *yuan* in that, unlike *yuan*, the situations that trigger *nu* need not viewed by one as directed against oneself, though it can be.

As such, *nu* is more like *yun* 愠. *Yun* is a form of displeasure directed to any situation that one finds displeasing, without necessarily identifying who has brought about the situation (*Guoyu* 6.12; *Lunyu* 1.1, 15.2). *Yun* can also be directed to situations in which one finds another person’s action offensive (*Guoyu* 4.44, 7.5). Both *nu* and *yun* are typically not used transitively, even when they are triggered by situations that involve a responsible party. This suggests that, even in such a situation, *nu* and *yun* are directed primarily to the situation rather than to the person who has brought it about, unlike *yuan* which is directed specifically to the person. As for the difference between *nu* and *yun*, it appears to be primarily a matter of how strong one’s response might be. *Nu* by comparison to *yun* is a more intense reaction that can result in quite severe action.

Like *yuan*, *nu* can be hidden or stored (*Mengzi* 5A:3). But typically, *nu* is outwardly expressed and is associated with certain facial expressions (*Mengzi* 2B:12). It can lead to quite severe action, such as depriving someone of something (*Guoyu* 1.23; *Xunzi* 1.12b-13a), driving someone away (*Guoyu* 2.27), beating someone (*Guoyu* 4.27), acts of fighting (*Guoyu* 1.15, 4.96, 7.1), as well as killing (*Guoyu* 4.94, 8.5). Because of the intensity and severity of *nu*, it can strain the relationship between people, even between father and son (*Mengzi* 4A:18).

*Nu*, by contrast to another term *fen* 忿, is more sustained and enduring; the contrast is like that between anger and an outburst. *Fen* is something more of the moment (*Lunyu* 12.21). It is

like *yuan* in being described as ‘small’ (*xiao* 小) in the sense of being directed to something of lesser significance, probably also with the connotation of a loss of proper perspective and of control over oneself (*Chunqiu Zuo zhuan* B5.24, B11.6; *Guoyu* 1.15, 2.23). So, *fen* is like *yuan* in being generally viewed as an undesirable or inappropriate kind of response.

*Nu*, unlike *yuan* and *fen*, can be entirely in order, as in the case of the *nu* of King Wen and King Wu, acting on which resulted in peace to the Empire (*Mengzi* 1B:3, cf. 3B:2). Later Confucians such as Zhu Xi draw a distinction between an ethical form of anger (*yi li zhi nu* 義理之怒) and a physical form of anger (*xie qi zhi nu* 血氣之怒), the latter being impulsive responses to affronts while the former are responses to situations one regards as ethically inappropriate and awaiting correction. The former can still lead to severe action, as in the case of King Wu whose anger at a tyrant led to military action, but such action is directed at correcting what is ethically problematic rather than countering personal affronts.<sup>12</sup>

To sum up, *nu* is a response of the heart/mind to situations that go against one’s wishes, just as *xi* is a response to situations that one finds welcoming. The situations that trigger *nu* need not be viewed as brought about by some specific individual, though they can be; even if so, the focus of attention is on the situation rather than the person. Unlike *yun* which is a milder form of displeasure, *nu* is a more intense reaction that can lead to severe action. And unlike *fen* which is more of a response of the moment, usually in relation to things of lesser significance, *nu* is more deliberate and sustained, and can be based on a reflective assessment of a situation as ethically problematic.

*Yuan* and *nu* are often mentioned together in early texts (*Mengzi* 5A:3; *Xunzi* 9.4). One difference between the two is that *yuan* is usually triggered by a situation in which one regards oneself as being ill-treated or failing to get what one deserves, and it is directed at the responsible party if there is one. *Nu*, on the other hand, is triggered by a situation that displeases but that need not involve one’s regarding oneself as being ill-treated; even when it does, its focus is more on the situation than the offending party. And because *yuan* is focused on the way one fares, it can be triggered by one’s dire circumstances in general, such as extreme poverty, while *nu* is usually triggered by a specific situation.

Another difference is that *yuan* is by comparison a less intense kind of response, involving a complaining state of the heart/mind which maybe expressed in verbal complaints, though in certain contexts it can also lead to strong reactions. *Nu*, on the other hand, is more intense and more focused on outward action, which can be quite severe. *Yuan* is a more likely reaction when the offending party is in a position of power so that there is little one can do to correct the situation, other than verbal complaints that are often made in private. When one’s dissatisfaction is directed toward one’s ruler, for example, a more likely kind of response is *yuan* rather than *nu* (*Guoyu* 1.5; *Xunzi* 19.5b). And because *yuan* is often associated with an inability to take corrective action, it tends to be more inner and hidden, and can be harbored and persist over time. *Nu*, once expressed through corrective action, would go away and no longer persist.

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<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the distinction between the two forms of anger, see my “On Anger – An Experimental Essay in Confucian Moral Psychology”.

And because *yuan* is focused more on oneself and how one fares, it is typically presented as an undesirable state – it is petty-minded and focuses on matters of lesser significance. By contrast, while *nu* can also take on a problematic form, it can be an entirely appropriate response to an ethically problematic situation.

In contemporary philosophical discussions, resentment is also described as a response to treatment of oneself that one finds insulting and degrading. In early China, there are two terms bearing an affinity to these ideas, *wu* 侮 and *ru* 辱, and related to *ru* 辱 is the term *chi* 恥 which refers to the attitude directed toward *ru* 辱. I turn now to a consideration of these three terms.

The difference between *wu* and *ru* is that *wu* concerns how certain treatment of oneself measures against public standards, while *ru* concerns one's view of such treatment. *Wu* focuses on the fact that certain treatment of oneself is inappropriate by public standards. This might take many forms, such as being stared at in the eyes, being beaten in public, or being treated in violation of certain accepted rules of conduct in a social setting (the rules of *li* 禮). *Wu* and *ru* are at times mentioned together in early texts (*Xunzi* 14.2a), and this linkage has to do with a common phenomenon in early China. Being subject to *wu*, or disrespectful treatment, one would be moved to fight back to counter the treatment, and if one fails to do so, this would result in *ru* (*Lushichunqiu* 16.29b-30b).

This phenomenon appears sufficiently pervasive that it led Songzi to propose that, as a way to stop this kind of fighting, we should urge people not to regard *wu* as *ru*. This proposal is sufficiently well known to be cited in a slogan-like fashion by both *Xunzi* (*Xunzi* 16.5a) and *Hanfeizi* (*Hanfeizi* 19.9b). Though *Xunzi* disagrees with Songzi (*Xunzi* 12.11a-11b), Songzi's proposal shows that, while *wu* has to do with the actual inappropriate treatment of oneself, *ru* has more to do with the way one views such treatment. If one views such treatment as potentially degrading oneself unless countered, then one would take countering measures. But if not, one would not be moved to so act. So, whether something is *ru* is a matter of one's viewpoint, a matter of whether the person views such treatment as degrading oneself.

Another difference between *wu* and *ru* is that, while *wu* has to do with the way in which one is treated, *ru* has to do with the person as a whole. It is the person as a whole that is subject to *ru*, as reflected in the locution *ru shen* 辱身 (*Lunyu* 18.8). *Ru* is contrasted with *rong* 榮, or honor (*Mengzi* 2A:4), and the whole of the fourth chapter of the *Xunzi* is devoted to a discussion of *rong* and *ru*. Thus, while *wu* is akin to the notion of insult, referring to disrespectful treatment, *ru* is akin to the notion of disgrace, referring to how the person as a whole can be degraded by such treatment. In severing the link between *wu* and *ru*, Songzi is making the point that, while a treatment might be insulting (*wu*) by public standards, one need not view the treatment as disgracing (*ru*) oneself.

That human beings dislike *ru* is described in early texts as a fundamental part of the human constitution (*Xunzi* 2.10a; *Lushichunqiu* 5.10a, 8.4b). But while one might dislike (*wu* 惡) various things such as poverty or death, one's attitude toward *ru* takes on a special form described in terms of *chi* 恥. The terms *chi* 恥 and *ru* 辱 are often mentioned together (*Lunyu* 1.13; *Xunzi* 20.9a). *Chi* refers to one's attitude toward a situation that one regards as beneath



oneself.<sup>13</sup> It may be used transitively, taking as its object that which potentially occasions *ru* (*Lunyu* 4.9, 4.22, 5.15, 5.25, 14.27; *Mengzi* 1A:5, 2A:7, 4A:7, 4B:18, 6B:14). Or it may be used intransitively to describe the way one feels in certain kinds of situation (*Lunyu* 8.13, 9.27, 14.1; *Mengzi* 5B:5).

Though *chi* is often translated as “shame” or “regard as shameful”, it is not associated with the thought of being seen or the urge to hide oneself. Instead, the imagery is that of being tainted, and it is associated with the urge to cleanse oneself of what is tainting by correcting or avenging the situation.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, *chi* is closely related to anger (*nu*) at the situation, where such anger involves a strong sense of confidence in oneself rather than a sense of insecurity, and where the reaction is more a matter of outward behavior than one of harboring bitter feelings within. *Chi* can also be directed to a potentially disgraceful situation that is contemplated but has not yet materialized, in which case it is associated with a firm resolve to distance oneself from that situation through pre-emptive action.

Confucian texts emphasize the importance of people’s having *chi*, namely, having a proper sense of the appropriate objects of *chi* and a resolve to distance oneself from them (*Lunyu* 2.3, 13.20; *Mengzi* 7A:6). This emphasis on the sense of *chi* shows how the Confucians place importance on people’s being able to respond with *chi* to situations that genuinely warrants such response. The mention of *chi* in connection with the righteous anger (*nu*) of King Wu (*Mengzi* 1B:3) also shows that *chi*, if directed to the right kind of situation, is viewed positively. This explains the description of *chi* as ‘big’, that is, something of significance, in early texts (*Chunqiu Zuo zhuan* B5.28; *Guoyu* 2.23).

### III

Having considered terms that bear an affinity to the notions of resentment and anger as well as insult and disgrace, I turn now to terms that are potentially related to the notion of forgiveness. Through an examination of such terms, I will show that we cannot find any term in early Chinese texts that is close to the contemporary notion of forgiveness.

In modern Chinese, there are several expressions standardly used as translations of the term “forgive” or “forgiving”, such as *yuan liang* 原諒, *kuan shu* 寬恕, and *kuan rong* 寬容, as well as related expressions connoting leniency such as *rao shu* 饒恕 and *she mian* 赦免. I will look into the early use of the individual characters that make up these compounds. In addition, Christoph Harbsmeier has identified other characters in early texts that have some affinity to the notion of forgiveness, such as *you* 宥, *shi* 釋, *jie* 解, *fang* 放 and *zong* 蹤, and I will also consider the use of these characters.<sup>15</sup> Though Harbsmeier presents them as representing “Chinese

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of *chi* 恥, see my *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, pp. 58-63.

<sup>14</sup> Thus, *chi* occurs in the compound *xue chi* 雪恥, or cleansing oneself of *chi*, in early texts.

<sup>15</sup> Harbsmeier, pp. 16-17.

concepts within the semantic field of forgiveness”, he is using “forgiveness” in a way different from the notion found in contemporary philosophical discussions. His conclusion that these concepts have to do primarily with public acts of not pursuing otherwise punitive or retaliatory action rather than with psychological attitudes is consistent with the main conclusion of my discussion.<sup>16</sup> Using primarily the *Chunqiu Zuozhuan*, *Guoyu*, *Lunyu* and *Mengzi* as textual basis, I will consider in order the following characters: *she* 赦, *mian* 免, *yuan* 原, *liang* 諒, *rao* 饒, *shu* 恕, *you* 寬, *rong* 容, *you* 宥, *shi* 釋, *jie* 解, *fang* 放 and *zong* 縱.

*She* 赦 refers to someone’s refraining from doing something negative to another party when he has the authority or power to do so. For example, the ruler of a state might decide to let go an official of an enemy state who has been captured in war (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B3.14; *Guoyu* 1.24, 2.23), or spare a subordinate who has done something that angered him despite originally planning to punish the subordinate (*Guoyu* 4.94). Another example is for the ghosts and spirits to refrain from causing illness to someone though they have the power to do so (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B5.26).

In many instances of its use, *she* involves one’s refraining from punishing someone for a crime, offence, or some fault punishable by established standards. For example, the object of *she* can be *zui* 罪, where *zui* can be literally a crime or, in the political context, an offence to another state or its ruler (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B8.13, B10.5, B10.14; *Guoyu* 6.4, 8.1; *Lunyu* 20.1). The object of *she* can be *guo* 過, or faults (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B9.28; *Lunyu* 13.2), as well as *fa* 罰 or *xing* 刑, terms having to do with punishment (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B10.25, B10.26, B12.3). From these observations, we see that *she* is primarily a behavioral term, referring to a public act of refraining from doing something negative to and letting go another party when one has the authority or power to do so.

The next term, *mian* 免, has the general meaning of being free from or avoiding something (*Lunyu* 17.21; *Mengzi* 1A:4). What is avoided can be death (*Mengzi* 1A:7, 6B:14) or some disaster (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B2.6, B4.2, B11.13; *Guoyu* 4.106). When used by itself without specifying that which is avoided, *mian* often refers to one’s avoiding some disastrous outcomes (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B1.4, B5.27; *Guoyu* 1.22) while *bu mian* 不免, or not *mian*, refers to one’s being unable to avoid such disastrous outcomes (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B8.15, B9.10, B9.29). In its more specific usage, *mian* can refer to one’s actively removing something, such as an armor (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B5.33, B8.16, B12.16; *Guoyu* 1.19, 4.69), a cap (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B12.15), or even removing someone from office (*Guoyu* 2.7, 4.99).

More pertinent to our purpose is the use of *mian* in connection with one’s avoiding punishment, or refraining from committing a crime or offence (*Guoyu* 4.54, 6.16; *Lunyu* 5.2). In such usages, the difference between *she* and *mian* is that *she* refers to the act of refraining from imposing punishment that has already been incurred, while *mian* refers to one’s being able to avoid committing a crime or offence, or avoid incurring punishment (*Lunyu* 2.3). When a crime or offence has already been committed or punishment already incurred, the difference between *she* and *mian* is that *she* refers to the refraining of punishment by the party with authority while

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<sup>16</sup> Harbsmeier, pp. 17-18.

*mian* refers to the avoidance of punishment by the offending party (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* 3.22). But *mian* can also be used in a way close to *she*, referring to the act, by the party with authority, of sparing someone from punishment or from being killed (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B2.13, B8.17; *Guoyu* 4.115). When so used, the difference between *she* and *mian* is that *she* emphasizes the connotation of refraining from punishing a person, while *mian* emphasizes the connotation of bringing it about that the person is relieved of the punishment.

Turning to *yuan* 原 and *liang* 諒, there is, as far as I can tell, no instance of the usage of either term in the *Chunqiu Zuozhuan*, *Guoyu*, *Lunyu* and *Mengzi* in the sense in which the compound *yuan liang* 原諒 is used in modern Chinese. The same is true of *rao* 饒, which occurs in the compound 饒恕. As for *shu* 恕, it is explained in *Lunyu* 15.24 in terms of not bestowing (*shi* 施) on others what one would not desire to be bestowed on oneself. The linkage between *shu* and *shi* 施 is also found in other contexts to describe one's bestowing (*shi*) things on others in a way that exhibits *shu* (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B9.23). *Shu* is usually presented as a desirable quality in early texts, presumably referring to one's being considerate in dealing with others (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B1.3, B1.11, B5.15, B9.24; *Mengzi* 7A:4). Thus, in early texts, *shu* refers to one's being considerate in bestowing things on and in dealing with others, rather than referring specifically to a 'forgiving' attitude toward an offender.

*Shu* is used in modern Chinese in the compound *kuan shu* 寬恕 as a possible translation of "to forgive", and *kuan* 寬 is also viewed generally as a desirable quality in early texts (*Lunyu* 3.26, 17.6). It refers to a mindset that is contrasted with being narrow-minded (*bi* 鄙) and so is a matter of being broad-minded (*Mengzi* 5B:1, 7B:15). As such, it is related to *hui* 惠, being generous toward and bestowing favors on others (*Guoyu* 1.23, 3.1, 4.8, 4.102). *Kuan* is presented as a way of dealing with people in general (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B8.9, B10.13; *Guoyu* 7.9) which will enable one to gain their allegiance (*Lunyu* 20.1).

The usage of *kuan* particularly pertinent to our purpose is when it is used in relation to the penal system (*xing* 刑) (*Guoyu* 7.9) and government policy (*zheng* 政) (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B10.20), such usage being sometimes related to *she* 赦 and *mian* 免 (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B3.22). In such contexts, *kuan* has to do with being lenient and not harsh, and it differs from *she* and *mian* in that it emphasizes one's mindset rather than public action, though such a mindset also leads to lenient action.

Although *kuan* has to do with one's mindset and can lead to lenient action, it is unlike the notion of forgiveness in that it is not primarily a matter of the way we view an offending party. Even if we consider someone changing from being narrow-minded (*bi* 鄙) to being broad-minded (*kuan* 寬) (*Mengzi* 5B:1, 7B:15), the change is primarily one of correcting a deficiency in ourselves, and only derivatively a change in the way we view others. That is, prior to the change, even if we view someone in a negative light, this is due to our own narrow-mindedness rather than being an appropriate response to a flaw in the other party, and the change is primarily a matter of correcting this deficiency in ourselves rather than coming to view a flaw in the other party in a more favorable light.

*Kuan* is used in modern Chinese in the compound *kuan rong* 寬容 to describe one's being broad-minded and accommodating. In early texts, aside from referring to one's facial expression, *rong* is used in the sense of having a place for or giving a place to someone (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B9.23, B10.1, B10.7, B11.9; *Mengzi* 6B:8). When used to describe one's dealing with others in general, it has the connotation of being encompassing and accommodating (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B9.14, B12.6; *Guoyu* 1.31; *Lunyu* 19.3). So, *rong* can refer to the mindset of being encompassing and accommodating, but even when so used, it is again not like the contemporary notion of forgiveness in that, as in the case of *kuan*, a change from not *rong* to *rong* is primarily a correction of a deficiency in oneself.

Let us consider a few other terms that Harbsmeier describes as representing "concepts within the semantic field of forgiveness". *You* 宥 is closely related to *she* 赦 and the two are often used together (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B9.11, B9.14; *Guoyu* 7.1). *You* by itself is used in connection with *zui* 罪, a crime or offence (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B8.18, B9.28; *Guoyu* 3.5, 4.78). As we saw earlier, *she* is also often so used. In a passage in the *Chunqiu Zuozhuan*, *she* and *you* occurs together, with *she* being used in connection with *zui* and *you* in connection with the orphaned and the widowed (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B10.14). Here, *you* has to do with relieving the weak and deprived rather than relieving someone of potential punishment. Probably, the difference between *you* and *she* is that *you* emphasizes more the disposition of the heart/mind toward bringing relief to others, whether through leniency in punishment or through assisting the weak and deprived, while *she* refers to the specific lenient act. That *you* has to do with a disposition of the heart/mind rather than specific action can be seen from the pairing of *you* with *kuan* (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B10.13) and the presentation of *you* as a matter of *kuan* (*Guoyu* 1.28). The relation between *kuan* and *you* is probably that, while *kuan* refers to a general mindset of being broad-minded, *you* refers to one aspect of *kuan*, namely, the disposition to bring relief to others. *You* differs from the contemporary notion of forgiveness in that it refers to such a disposition rather than to a change in the way one views an offender.

*Shi* 釋 is used in the sense of being without something (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B6.6). It is also used to refer to an attitude of removing something such as armor (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B9.28, B10.25), attire (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B9.14), or sword (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B12.17; *Guoyu* 7.5). It can be used to refer to the act of untying (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B5.6, B10.4), or coming to the relief of another state in wartime (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B5.27, B5.28; *Guoyu* 4.44, 4.51). More pertinent to our purpose is its use to refer to one's being without guilt or being found not guilty (*Guoyu* 4.10) and to one's letting go someone who has been made a prisoner (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* A5.21, B5.30, B8.3, B9.26; *Guoyu* 4.9), in which case *shi* is opposed to *zhi* 執, making someone a prisoner (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B10.13; *Guoyu* 4.25). As seen from these usages, *shi* is a term referring primarily to an action. While *mian* 免 is also used in the sense of being without something or removing something, *shi* is probably more concrete in its connotations. *Mian* emphasizes more the connotation of being without or making it the case that one is without something, and *shi* is used primarily to refer to a specific act of removing something, untying, or letting go. Neither term involves the kind of change of heart highlighted in the contemporary notion of forgiveness.

Another term *jie* 解 can be used to refer to the act of dividing up land (*Guoyu* 2.8), removing parts of one's attire or armor (*Guoyu* 3.6), coming to the relief of some state or city in warfare (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B5.15), or relieving one of one's worries (*Mengzi* 5A:1). In these last two usages, *jie* has to do with relieving someone or some entity of some unwelcome circumstances. This takes it close to terms like *she* 赦 or *shi* 釋 though *jie* is by comparison used much less frequently, if at all, in relation to crime or offence or punishment. In any instance, *jie* again has to do primarily with actions rather than a change of attitude toward an offender.

The same is true of *fang* 放, which is used to refer to specific acts such as letting go of something (*Mengzi* 6A:8), exiling someone (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B3.6, A7.1, B7.1, B9.21, B9.29, B10.1, B10.3, A10.8, A12.3; *Guoyu* 4.39), or letting someone go (*Mengzi* 5A:3). Another character *zong* 縱 is also used to refer to acts of letting someone go (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B12.26). The difference between *fang* and *zong* is probably that, while *fang* emphasizes the act of letting someone go, *zong* emphasizes what happens thereby, namely the person can now freely move about doing various things. This explains why *zong* can also be used in the sense of indulging, freely doing certain things to the detriment of oneself or of others (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B10.10; *Guoyu* 1.13, 1.16, 2.15, 5.1, 6.15), or in the sense of letting one's enemies freely do things to the detriment of oneself (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan* B5.33). Again, both *fang* and *zong* refer primarily to actions, unlike the contemporary notion of forgiveness.

Our examination of the early use of terms potentially related to the notion of forgiveness shows that these terms either have to do primarily with actions, or if they have to do with the heart/mind, they refer to a certain mindset (as in the case of *kuan* or *rong*) or a disposition to perform certain kinds of actions (as in the case of *you*). For terms that have to do with one's mindset or disposition, a change conveyed through their use is primarily a matter of correcting some deficiency in oneself, such as a change from being narrow-minded (*bi* 鄙) to being broad-minded (*kuan* 寬). This is unlike the kind of change of heart involved in the contemporary notion of forgiveness, which emphasizes a change in the way one views an offending party. Thus, none of the terms we have considered come close to the notion of forgiveness highlighted in contemporary philosophical discussions.

#### IV

In Section 2, we saw that there are terms in early Chinese texts akin to the contemporary notions of resentment and anger as well as the notions of insult and disgrace. In Section 3, we saw that there is no term in early Chinese texts akin to the contemporary notion of forgiveness, understood in terms of forswearing resentment through a change in the way one views an offending party. Why is there a notion akin to resentment but not forgiveness in early China? A possible answer is that the focus of the early Chinese was on action in the public domain rather than psychological management, and that is why they have a developed vocabulary for acts of leniency but not for a change in the way one views an offender. However, in the evolvement of

Confucian thought up to the Song-Ming period, there has been a growing attention to the workings of the human psychology, with extensive discussions of how to manage the inner workings of the heart/mind. Still, we do not find a developed vocabulary that is akin to the contemporary notion of forgiveness. It will take another extensive investigation to show that such vocabulary has indeed not developed by this time. But even without such an investigation, it seems fair to say that the presence of such a vocabulary is not conspicuous and that the contemporary notion of forgiveness is not idealized in Confucian thought. Why is this the case?

The answer I propose is that this is because the Confucians do not share two assumptions that underlies the contemporary view of resentment and forgiveness. The first is the view of resentment as protective of self-respect, and the second is the assumption that resentment is an ineradicable part of the human condition. I will discuss the first assumption in this section and the second in the next.

Contemporary discussions often describe resentment as a ‘reactive attitude’, a notion highlighted in P.F. Strawson’s classic paper “Freedom and Resentment”. However, the way they relate resentment to self-respect goes beyond the way Strawson characterizes the reactive attitude of resentment. In introducing the reactive attitudes, Strawson speaks “of the non-detached attitudes and reactions of people directly involved in transactions with each other; of the attitudes and reactions of offended parties and beneficiaries; of such things as gratitude, resentment, forgiveness, love, and hurt feelings.”<sup>17</sup> He contrasts the reactive attitudes with the objective attitude, one that we take up toward agents who are psychologically abnormal or morally undeveloped, as in the case of the “deranged, neurotic, or just a child”.<sup>18</sup> The objective attitude is opposed to “the attitude (or range of attitudes) of involvement or participation in a human relationship”, and it “cannot include the range of reactive feelings and attitudes which belong to involvement or participation with others in inter-personal human relations.”<sup>19</sup>

Although Strawson mentions gratitude, resentment, forgiveness, and the attitudes and reactions of offended parties and beneficiaries as examples of reactive attitudes, reactive attitudes are not confined to these first personal attitudes and reactions. Our reactions toward the way others are treated are also participatory in a way opposed to the objective attitude, and Strawson himself describes indignation, or what he calls “resentment on behalf of another”, as another example of a reactive attitude.<sup>20</sup> Within the scope of reactive attitudes, he distinguishes between the “personal reactive attitudes” and the “generalized or vicarious analogues of the personal reactive attitudes” that we have on behalf of others. This distinction parallels that

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<sup>17</sup> Strawson, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Strawson, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Strawson, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Strawson, p. 14.

between “the points of view of one whose interest was directly involved ... and of others whose interest was not directly involved.”<sup>21</sup>

Another point made by Strawson in relation to the reactive attitudes has to do with the attitudes and intentions of the agent toward those affected by his actions. Strawson emphasizes “the very great importance that we attach to the attitudes and intentions towards us of other human beings, and the great extent to which our personal feelings and reactions depend upon, or involve, our beliefs about these attitudes and intentions.”<sup>22</sup> According to him, the benefit or injury to us of others’ actions also reside in the attitudes and intentions of others. And these observations he extends to what he calls the “generalized form” of the “personal reactive attitudes”. We also demand “the manifestation of a reasonable degree of goodwill or regard, on the part of others, not simply toward oneself, but toward all those on whose behalf moral indignation may be felt.”<sup>23</sup>

The phenomena that Strawson alluded to in relation to the reactive attitudes are all recognizably present in early Chinese texts. There is a rich vocabulary for what Strawson calls non-detached or participatory attitudes and reactions, and the distinction between what he calls personal reactions and reactions we have on behalf of others is also built into the language. *Yuan* is an example of the first kind of reactions, while *nu* can be used of both. The differential responses emphasized by the Confucians – e.g., my response to the injury of my parents differs from that toward the injury of someone else’s parents – assumes such a distinction. The importance of the agent’s attitudes and intentions to those affected is recognized, and there is explicit discussion of how such attitudes and intentions make a difference to the response of the affected party. For example, implicit in the notion of *de* 德 (virtue, power) is the view that benefitting others out of genuine concern for them will bring about a response that would not be present if the benefitting action is intended to serve some other purpose.

Strawson’s discussion does not bring in references to one’s self-respect, and the way contemporary discussions relates resentment to self-respect goes beyond the way he introduces the reactive attitude of resentment. Such discussions present intentional wrongdoings that harm us as insults and as attempts to degrade us, through the implicit message that we do not count as persons or are in some sense down below; as such, they constitute an attack on our self-respect.<sup>24</sup> Now, while acknowledging that the attitudes and intentions of others who benefit or harm us can make a difference to our response, and even if we say that they contain messages in this sense, it

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<sup>21</sup> Strawson, pp. 14-15.

<sup>22</sup> Strawson, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Strawson, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Murphy develops Strawson’s idea in this direction, saying that “not to have what Peter Strawson calls the ‘reactive attitude’ of resentment when our rights are violated is to convey – emotionally -- either that we do not think we have rights or that we do not take our rights very seriously” (p. 17), and he goes on to characterize moral injury as a challenge to one’s self-respect.

does not follow that these are messages about our low standing. This might be true of public insults and degrading treatment, but not clearly true of acts of self-interest that injure us. If some acquaintance stole something of mine out of greed, I might see it as a betrayal of trust, but it does not follow that I regard him as communicating through his act a message about my lower standing. Indeed, I might even believe that he is doing this partly out of jealousy about my standing, social or otherwise.

Perhaps, the linkage between wrongful injury and self-respect stems from the following line of thought. Whatever else I, as the victim, might believe about the offender's motive, what he does nevertheless shows a disregard for my interest and shows that he does not believe I deserve better treatment. In this sense, he shows me disrespect and his act communicates the message that I am not deserving of his respect. And it is my interpreting his action in this manner that leads me to assert myself to defend my standing, as well as to my focusing on him in a way that leads to more aggressive responses, such as hatred, malice, and vengeful sentiments.

In addition to its linkage to such aggressive responses, resentment has also been associated by some with a kind of brooding and defensive response, though others would view the notion as more neutral.<sup>25</sup> Some believe that resentment involves self-doubt and shows that one has low esteem, while others believe that this is not necessarily part of resentment.<sup>26</sup> Such disagreements about the use of the word "resentment" is not pertinent to the substantive issues and can be sidestepped through terminological stipulation. We may, if we wish, consciously restrict the use of the words "resent" and "resentment" to describe the response of asserting ourselves in light of wrongful treatment that we regard as challenging our standing, and relegate the additional connotations of aggressiveness, self-doubt, defensiveness, and being of a brooding nature to the words "resentful" and "resentfulness".<sup>27</sup> For convenience, I will from now on use the word "resentment" in this stipulated sense.

This move still leaves us with two substantive questions. First, is it indeed the case that all forms of wrongful treatment should ideally lead to resentment in this sense, with the victim viewing the offender as communicating a message about her standing and responding in a way that asserts her own standing? That is, is it indeed the case that failure to respond with resentment to wrongful injury shows a lack of self-respect? And second, when the victim does respond with resentment in this sense, is it indeed the case that forgiveness is the proper way to address such responses? Might there be another way of addressing such responses that is

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<sup>25</sup> Roberts thinks that the word "resentment" is often reserved for anger that is to some extent brooding and defensive (p. 291), while Griswold thinks that this element of feeding on itself and self-aggrandizement is an abusive form of resentment (pp. 29-30).

<sup>26</sup> Hampton thinks that resentment involves a defiant reaffirmation of one's rank and value in the face of treatment calling them into question in one's mind (pp. 56-60), while Griswold defends the view that proper resentment is not due to low self-esteem (pp. 45-46).

<sup>27</sup> I made this move in my "On Anger – An Experimental Essay in Confucian Moral Psychology".



different from forgiveness and that humans might aspire to? I will address the second question in the next section and the first in the remainder of this section.

The Confucian position is that, ideally, we should not respond to wrongful treatment of ourselves with resentment in the sense just described. This is so even if the wrongful treatment involves explicitly insulting behavior. This position is a consequence of the way the Confucians understand what is truly disgraceful.

Earlier, we considered the early Chinese notions of *wu* 侮 (insult) and *ru* 辱 (disgrace); *wu*, or insult, has to do with the fact that one has been treated inappropriately by public standards, while *ru*, or disgrace, has to do with one's perspective on such treatment, namely, one regards such treatment as degrading oneself. A common perspective of the times is that being insulted leads to disgrace unless one fights back or counters the insulting behavior in some other way. To address the pervasive fighting that resulted from such a perspective, Songzi proposes that we should stop viewing what is insulting as a disgrace. Xunzi disagrees on the ground that whether people fight depends on what they dislike, and as long as they dislike insulting treatment, the fighting will not stop regardless of whether one views such treatment as disgraceful (*Xunzi* 12.11a-11b). Contrary to Xunzi, however, Songzi has probably made a valid point – in not regarding the insulting treatment as disgraceful, one no longer sees it as a personal affront even if one still dislikes it, and it is seeing something as a personal affront that leads to the kind of pervasive fighting that has become problematic. In any instance, Xunzi's own position is not substantively different from Songzi's in that he also advocates a transformation in what one regards as truly disgraceful. According to him, what we regard as disgraceful should not be tied to the way others view or treat us, but should be a matter of our own ethical conduct, which also includes the way we respond to others' treatment of ourselves (*Xunzi* 12.12b).

This view is shared by practically all Confucian thinkers. In a number of passages in the *Lunyu*, *chi* 恥, the attitude toward *ru*, is presented as being directed to one's own qualities and actions (*Lunyu* 5.25, 8.13, 14.1, 14.27; cf. *Xunzi* 3.12a). In *Mengzi* 2A:2, Mencius distinguishes between a higher and a lower form of courage. The latter has to do with fighting in response to insulting treatment, while the former has to do with the resolve to act in accordance with what one regards as ethically appropriate. In *Mengzi* 6A:16, he also distinguishes between what is truly honorable, namely living up to the ethical, from what is honorable by ordinary standards, namely, attaining high positions in office. Thus, what is truly disgraceful has to do with one's own ethical qualities, rather than the way one is viewed or treated by others, a view also shared by later Confucians, who idealize the form of anger that is directed to what is ethically appropriate rather than at personal affronts. For example, in his commentary on *Mengzi* 1B:3, which refers to the anger of King Wu, Zhu Xi remarks that one should not have the lower form of courage which involves anger of the latter kind, and should not be lacking in the higher form of courage which involve anger of the former kind.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, on the Confucian view, when one is wrongfully injured, the focus of one's attention should be on the ethical quality of one's response rather than on the how one's standing

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<sup>28</sup> Zhu Xi *Mengzi Jizhu* 1.18b, *Zhu Xi Yulei*: 239. For further elaboration on Zhu Xi's views, see my "On Anger – An Experimental Essay in Confucian Moral Psychology".

is challenged by the offender. One may respond with anger to the ethically problematic quality of the situation, and as a matter of differential response, one may respond with greater intensity and urgency if the victim is oneself or someone close to oneself. But, ideally, there should not be an additional element of the response that is directed to the way one's standing has been challenged because, on the Confucian view, one's standing is a matter of one's own ethical qualities rather than the way one is viewed or treated by others.

That the Confucians advocate such a position does not mean that they are not aware of the practical reality that humans can be subject to sentiments akin to resentment; their reference to *yuan* shows such an awareness. After all, the Confucian view of what is truly disgraceful is itself directed against this kind of sentiment. But they advocate a move away from this kind of sentiment to a perspective that focuses on the ethical quality of one's response. The way to address such sentiment is to make a shift toward such a perspective, and not through forgiveness in the sense described earlier. In the next section, we will consider what the difference is between such a shift in perspective and the kind of change of heart involved in forgiveness. For now, let us consider how the Confucians would respond to two potential objections implied in the contemporary discussion.

The first is that a failure to respond with resentment shows that one does not take oneself seriously and that one lacks self-respect. On the Confucian view, not responding with resentment to wrongful injury does not mean that one does not take oneself seriously. On the contrary, one's attention is very much on oneself, not on the way one is viewed by others, but on the way one conducts oneself in response. As for the notion of self-respect, whether the notion is applicable depends on how it is understood. The notion is often used in connection with a commitment not to fall below certain standards that define one's ideal conception of the kind of life one leads. But these standards can be of two different kinds. They might focus on what is due to oneself, and the commitment involved is a commitment to not allow oneself to be treated in violation of such standards. Or they might concern the ethical standards that govern one's way of life, and the commitment involved is a commitment to not fall below such standards in one's qualities and actions.<sup>29</sup>

If we are to use the notion of self-respect in characterizing the Confucian position, then the difference between the Confucian position and the contemporary view presented earlier is that the Confucians advocate our understanding self-respect in terms of the second kind of standards, while the contemporary view understands it in terms of the first. Indeed, the Confucian conception of what is truly disgraceful may be viewed as a deliberate shift of focus from the first to the second kind of standards. So, if we are to use the notion of self-respect in characterizing the Confucian position, then the response to wrongful injury idealized by the Confucians does not show a lack of self-respect, but shows a different way of conceptualizing self-respect.

The second potential objection is that a failure to respond with resentment to wrongful injury shows that one does not take other human beings seriously by not paying attention to their

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<sup>29</sup> See my "Ethical Self-Commitment and Ethical Self-Indulgence" for further elaboration.

attitude toward oneself. In its milder form, the objection is that a disregard for how others view us assumes a crude form of “atomic individualism” by ignoring the social context within which we live.<sup>30</sup> In its stronger form, it sees in such a position a form of arrogance in that one views others’ opinions of oneself as of no significance.<sup>31</sup>

The Confucian position is not vulnerable to such an objection. They do acknowledge that others’ opinions of oneself are of significance as it can be instrumental to one’s having a more realistic self-assessment. Confucian texts such as the *Lunyu* and the *Mengzi* comment on how one should engage in self-reflection should one be judged unfavorably by others, so as to determine whether there might be some genuine defect in oneself that has called forth such judgment.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the Confucians do not deny that the way we are viewed by others does matter; in the *Lunyu*, we often find Confucius lamenting the lack of appreciation by others. The Confucian position is rather that, even though these things do matter, they pale in significance compared to our own ethical qualities. What constitute our standing are primarily our own ethical qualities, including the way we respond to wrongful injury by others. To focus on how such treatment poses challenges to our standing is to misdirect our attention away from what is of genuine significance.

## V

The position just described assumes that it is possible for humans to take on a perspective from which one’s standing is a matter of one’s own ethical qualities rather than the way others view oneself. It might be objected that this is a unrealistic caricature of the human condition, and such a view is shared by several contemporary authors. For example, while acknowledging that someone “certain of the value of one’s self” might be totally indifferent to potential attacks on one’s self-esteem, Jeffrie G. Murphy notes that some weakness or vulnerability in the area of self-esteem is an ineliminable part of the human condition. Jesus might have this kind of confidence, but humans cannot.<sup>33</sup> Charles I. Griswold notes that, while the sage might not react with resentment because he does not attach significance to how others regard himself, humans are non-sages and do care about how one is regarded by others.<sup>34</sup> According to him, forgiveness is not idealized in Greco-Roman culture because for Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, the virtuous person is above resentment as she is invulnerable to the kind of injury to which

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<sup>30</sup> See Murphy, p. 93.

<sup>31</sup> See Murphy who describes such a position as the Nietzschean view (pp. 18-19).

<sup>32</sup> For further elaboration on this point, see my “Self and Self-Cultivation in Early Confucian Thought.”

<sup>33</sup> Murphy, pp. 93-94.

<sup>34</sup> Griswold, p. 45.

resentment is a response.<sup>35</sup> But one would not feel resentment if unjustly treated only if one is very much above common life or is insensitive for such reasons as self-deception or emotional blockage.<sup>36</sup> Vladimir Jankelevitch, referring to Socrates, Jesus, and the Stoics, again describes the sage as not vulnerable to such injury and hence exempted from the efforts of forgiveness, but thinks this is not the human condition.<sup>37</sup>

This is the second assumption that I alluded to namely, the view not just that humans are in actuality vulnerable to resentment, but also that they are unable to transform themselves to become invulnerable to resentment. That humans lack this ability is not at all obvious, and it is an assumption that the Confucians reject. If the sage or the virtuous person who is above resentment is held up as a moral exemplar, then it seems this is an ideal that humans should aspire to and seek to approximate. Even if resentment is part of the ordinary human condition, it is not a desirable kind of response to wrongful injury and we should strive to shift to a perspective from which we would no longer feel resentment.

In what way is this kind of change different from that involved in forgiveness? In contemporary discussions, forgiveness is presented as a change in the way one views the offender. One abandons the attitudes associated with resentment and comes to view the offender as decent after all and as someone with whom one can maintain a relationship.<sup>38</sup> To undergo this change, one has to drop any presumption of one's own importance or moral superiority, and empathetically see things from the perspective of the offender. In addition, one has to be able to sympathize with the perspective of the offender, and the whole process needs intellectual as well as affective efforts.<sup>39</sup> And this forswearing of resentment should happen only on appropriate grounds which are often put in terms of the offender being separable as a person from his wrongful act and from the character trait that accounts for the act. This can come about because, for example, the offender has repented. Only then would forgiveness be compatible with one's self-respect; to be too easy to forgive is to show that one does not take oneself seriously.<sup>40</sup>

The change involved on the Confucian view is different. From the Confucian perspective, in responding with resentment to wrongful injury, one is reacting from a perspective that is problematic to start with. By regarding one's standing as constituted by the way others view oneself, one has lost a proper sense of what is significant to one's standing. The change one should undergo involves correcting this deficiency in oneself, and it is a change that one should undertake independently of any change on the part of the offender such as repentance. Such change involves one's no longer seeing one's standing as tied to the way one is viewed by others,

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<sup>35</sup> Griswold, pp. 1-2, 8-14.

<sup>36</sup> Griswold, p. 40.

<sup>37</sup> Jankelevitch, pp. 6-8, 66,72.

<sup>38</sup> See Murphy, p. 21; Hampton, pp. 84-85, 151, 157-158; Novitz, p. 306; Griswold, pp. 53-59.

<sup>39</sup> See Novitz, pp. 308-311; Griswold, pp. 53-59; Roberts, p. 289.

<sup>40</sup> See Murphy, pp. 23-25; Novitz, pp. 313-314; Griswold, p. 40.

and consequently abandoning the resentment that stemmed from this view of things. It does not involve one's abandoning other kinds of response appropriate to the situation, such as indignation and taking corrective action.

Thus, the focus of the change is on correcting a deficiency in oneself, not on the offender. By downplaying the importance of the way others view oneself and by no longer seeing acts of injury as attacks on one's self-respect, one's initial resentment dissipates. In doing so, one also comes to see the offender in a different way, and perhaps in the same way that would have resulted from an act of forgiveness – namely, the offender is decent after all and someone with whom I can enter into or maintain a relationship. But this change is derivative from the shift of perspective that one undertakes, where the shift is focused on correcting a deficiency in oneself. The resentment that is eliminated is, so to speak, transcended, in that it results from one's effort to correct a deficiency in oneself, rather than from a conscious and direct effort to eliminate the resentment by viewing the offender in a different light. This view does not deny the importance of the efforts at an empathetic understanding of the offender and at having compassion on and pro-attitude toward the offender. Such efforts are important not just on the part of the victim of wrongful injury, but also on the part of those who are unrelated to the victim, whether in assessing the appropriateness of their indignant anger toward the offender or in determining what corrective action might be appropriate. The Confucian view is only that, to the extent that efforts are needed to address the sentiment of resentment, the efforts should focus more on correcting one's own perspective.

## VI

To summarize, we have shown that the Confucians do not idealize resentment as a response to wrongful injury to oneself, where resentment is understood as a reaction to challenges to one's self-respect posed by the wrongful injury. The reason is that the Confucians believe that one's self-respect is not a matter of how one is viewed by others, but a matter of one's own ethical qualities. Even if we do respond with resentment, these are reactions that we should ideally have done without in the first place. Their presence shows a deficiency in ourselves, and to address such reactions, the primary focus of our efforts should be to correct this deficiency in ourselves rather than to change the way we view the offender. Addressing this deficiency will result in our viewing the offender differently, but efforts devoted to the former are not efforts at forgiveness as they are not directly focused on altering the way we view the offender. Thus, just as the Confucians do not idealize resentment as a response to wrongful injury, they also do not idealize forgiveness as a way to address such responses.

The fundamental difference between the Confucian position and the contemporary view sketched at the beginning of the paper has to do with different emphases in the way they view the person. On the latter view, the emphasis is on the idea of respect for persons, both by others and by oneself. For someone to wrongfully injure another is for the offender to show disrespect to the victim. If the victim takes herself seriously, she should assert herself to protect her self-respect thereby responding with resentment. Such resentment might take on excessive forms such as

hatred and vengefulness, and as such need to be moderated. But it should stay in place in the moderated and non-excessive form to the extent that the offender maintains his posture of disrespect for the victim. It is only when the offender has altered that stance, disassociating himself from his act through such acts as repentance, that the victim should alter the way she views the offender and forswear her resentment toward him. This is the act of forgiveness.

On the Confucian view, the emphasis is on the way a person's qualities and actions measure against certain ethical standards. In wrongful injury, the offender has acted in a way, and presumably also demonstrated personal qualities, that fall below such standards, and such acts call for indignation, or righteous anger. Such anger can take on a more intense and complex form if one is oneself the victim, but this is a matter of differential responses due to differences in the way one relates to the victim. The focus of the victim should still be on how the offender's action, and her own response, measure against certain ethical standards. Her focus is not on how she is viewed and treated by the offender, and so she should not respond with resentment as a way of protecting herself against the challenge from the offender. To the extent that she does so respond, she should shift to a perspective from which her focus is no longer on such challenge, as a result of which the resentment will dissipate. This change is primarily a matter of correcting a deficiency in herself, rather than a change in the way she views the offender, even though the latter change does follow from the former. In this way, the Confucians idealize a way of addressing resentment that is different from forgiveness.

Although I have presented the details of the Confucian position as an alternative to the contemporary view, I am not arguing for the merit of the former over the latter. No doubt, the difference between the two derives from fundamental cultural differences, such as differences in the way we view the human person, between which it is difficult if not impossible to adjudicate.<sup>41</sup> But at least, through my presentation of the Confucian position, I hope to have rendered it intelligible even to someone with a different perspective who, even if not endorsing the Confucian perspective, can at least understand its appeal to those who do endorse such a position.

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<sup>41</sup> Downie also acknowledges that whether one idealizes forgiveness is a matter of moral systems and cultural outlooks that can differ (pp. 133-4).

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