Anger, Compassion, and the Distinction between First and Third Person

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Abstract

The paper presents a perspective on our relation to our environment that is inspired by Confucian thought and that stands in contrast to certain common strands in contemporary philosophical discussions. It conceptualizes our relation to what we encounter on a day-to-day basis primarily in terms of the way we experience and respond to *situations*, rather than to the *objects* affected in the situations**.** From this perspective, the contemporary philosophical distinction between a first and a third person point of view is often not suited for describing our responses to situations. Instead, our responses to situations can vary along different dimensions, including the way we direct our attention, our thoughts and sentiments, our motivations, etc., and these variations admit of degrees. Such variations depend on various factors, such as the different ways in which one relates to the object affected in a situation and the kind of person one is. and cannot be adequately described in terms of a shift from one point of view to another. The paper discusses two examples, anger and compassion, to illustrate this alternative perspective, but the discussion can be extended to other areas such as gratitude.

1. Introduction

In this paper, I present a way of conceptualizing our relation to our environment that contrasts with certain common strands in contemporary philosophical discussions. This alternative perspective has two related features. First, it conceptualizes our relation to what we encounter on a day-to-day basis primarily in terms of the way we experience and respond to *situations*, rather than to the *objects* affected in the situations**.** Second, the contemporary philosophical distinction between a first and a third person point of view is often not suited for describing the way we experience and respond to situations. As I have discussed the first feature in detail elsewhere, I will focus on the second in this paper.[1]

This alternative perspective is inspired by Confucian thought, but its appeal can be brought out on its own terms, without essential dependence on references to the Confucian tradition. Accordingly, I will minimize textual references to Confucian thought, except for including a few quotes to illustrate the source of the relevant ideas. To illustrate this alternative perspective, I will consider two examples, anger and compassion, drawing on previous publications on the two subjects.[2] In section 2, I will introduce these two features, and in sections 3 and 4, I will discuss,

[1] See Shun (forthcoming b).

[2] Shun 2014, 2015, 2018, forthcoming a.

respectively, the Confucian view on anger and on compassion. In section 5, I will return to the distinction between first and third person.

2. Responding to Situations and the Distinction between First and Third Person

Consider the way we experience and respond to what we encounter on a day-to-day basis. For convenience, I will refer to this as the way we *respond*, or just our *responses*, with the understanding that our responses also include how we experience what we encounter. Two kinds of locutions are commonly used in the English language to describe our responses. One presents them as directed to some *object*. For example, we are angry at someone, and we have sympathy for or empathize with someone. The other presents them as directed to some occurrence, happening, or state of affairs. For example, we also speak of our being angry at what someone has done or at what is going on. Though less frequently, we speak of our having sympathy for or emphasizing with someone's condition, and use other locutions such as our being touched or pained by what is happening to that person.

I will say of the second kind of locutions that they present our responses as being directed to *situations*, where the word "situation" is understood broadly to include occurrences and happenings, someone's being in a certain condition, someone's doing something, or just any state of affairs. Although the first kind of locution is common, it appears that the responses they describe are still primarily responses to situations rather than to objects as such. When I am angry at someone, my response is not to him as such, but to his doing certain things. When I have sympathy for someone, my response is not to her as such, but to her being in a certain condition.[3]

Still, on the surface, the first kind of locution appears to suggest that the responses are directed to *objects* as such. Once we think in such terms, it becomes tempting to emphasize a distinction between whether the individual affected is myself or someone else, and correspondingly a distinction between two points of view. If that individual is myself, I will be responding to that individual reflexively, from a first person point of view. If that individual is someone else, I will be responding to that individual from a third person point of view, different from that individual's own first person point of view.

This distinction is highlighted in P. F. Strawson's classic paper "Freedom and Resentment". Strawson introduces the idea of reactive attitudes as attitudes we take up in response to those acting as fully responsible agents, such attitudes being directed to "the attitudes and intentions toward us of other human beings", whether their actions "reflect attitudes toward us of goodwill, affection, or esteem on the one hand, or contempt, indifference, or malevolence on the other."[4] The reactive attitudes are of two kinds. The first includes the "non-detached attitudes and reactions of people directly involved in transactions with each other … the attitudes and

[3] Adam Smith also notes that what he calls "sympathy" is a response to situations (Smith 2010: 11). The point that our responses to our environment are directed to situations is conveyed in the pre-modern Chinese language in terms of how humans are "affected by" (*gan*) and "respond to" (*ying*) "affairs" (*shi*) that they encounter.

[4] Strawson (1974): 5.

reactions of offended parties and beneficiaries; (viz.) such things as gratitude, resentment, forgiveness, love, hurt feelings."[5] The second includes "reactions to the qualities of others' wills, not towards ourselves, but towards others."[6] Some examples are "punishing, moral condemnation, approval (which) permit … a certain detachment from the actions or agents which are their objects."[7] The first are "personal reactive attitudes", while the second are "the generalized or vicarious analogues of the personal reactive attitudes"; the second are "kindred attitudes" to the first and are like experiencing the first kind of reactive attitude "on behalf of" others.[8] An example is the relation between resentment and indignation – indignation is "resentment on behalf of another, where one's own interest and dignity are not involved; and it is this impersonal or vicarious character of the attitude which entitles it to the qualification 'moral'."[9] On the basis of these considerations, he highlights a distinction between "two points of view" – "the points of view of one whose interest was directly involved … and of others whose interest was not directly involved."[10]

As we mentioned, this distinction follows naturally from our conceptualizing our responses as directed primarily to the objects affected. If we conceptualize our responses as directed primarily to situations, it is no longer clear that it is appropriate to invoke such a distinction. Admittedly, when responding to situations, I can still distinguish between whether it is myself or someone else whose interest is involved in the situation. But in either case, it is the *situation* to which I am responding. Even when my own interest is involved, I do not stand to that situation in a special reflexive relation that warrants postulating a special point of view distinct from the point of view from which I respond to a situation involving someone else's interest. This does not mean that there is no difference between my responses to the two situations, only that there is no reason to characterize that difference in terms of two distinct points of view. As we will illustrate with the examples of anger and compassion, an alternative description of the difference is in terms of variations in different dimensions of my responses that fall along a spectrum admitting of degrees.

My discussion of the two examples is inspired by Confucian thought, and I will refer to four Confucian thinkers, generally agreed to be the most influential within the Confucian tradition. Two are from the earlier period, the so-called Warring States period: Confucius (6th to 5th century B.C.) and Mencius (4th to 3rd century B.C.). Two are from a later period, usually referred to in English as "Neo-Confucianism": Zhu Xi (1130-1200) and Wang Yangming (1472-1529).

3. Anger

The Confucians' view of anger evolved in the context of their public engagement, and has to do with the kind of personal injury we often encounter in the public domain such as the workplace.

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[5] Ibid.: 4.
[6] Ibid. 14.
[7] Ibid. 4.
[8] Ibid. 14-15.
[9] Ibid. 14
[10] Ibid. 15.

We will confine our discussion to such contexts, and will not consider situations involving a close personal relationship between the offending and injured party (e.g., betrayal by an unfaithful spouse) or between oneself and the injured party (e.g. Gordon Wilson and her daughter killed in the 1987 Enniskillen bombing). Nor will we consider extreme forms of injury, such as atrocities to groups (e.g., genocide) and incapacitating acts of cruelty. These other kinds of injury raise their own complexities, and there is no reason to expect a single uniform account applicable to all these different contexts.

Commenting on a remark in which Mencius distinguishes between a lower and a higher form of courage, Zhu Xi says:

"The lower form of courage involves *anger that pertains to the physical body*, while the higher form of courage involves *anger that pertains to morality*."[11]

And, commenting on Confucius' remark about the form that anger takes for his most talented student Yan Hui, Zhu Xi says:

"Yan Hui's anger *resides in things* and not *in the self* … It (the mind) is like a mirror reflecting things … it just follows things and respond."[12]

How should we make sense of this distinction between two forms of anger, and the metaphor of the mirror?

To address the question, I will make explicit two assumptions in Confucian thought. First, they work with a substantive ethical conception, part of which has to do with *differential responses* due to different relations. That is, it would be appropriate to respond differently to similar situations involving different parties, on the basis of the different relations that we stand to these parties. This assumption is not controversial for most of us, though we might ascribe different content to the substantive ethical conception.

The second assumption concerns an ideal of *ethical purity*. In relation to a substantive ethical conception, we may say that one responds ethically to a situation if that response conforms to the ethical conception. The Confucian ideal of ethical purity makes two points. First, ideally, we should be the kind of person who would respond ethically to any situation that we confront. The response includes not just what we do, but also our thoughts and sentiments, the way we direct attention, our motivations, etc. Second, being a person of this kind should constitute our sense of worthiness as a person, and should have a central importance in our lives. This point is put by the Confucians in terms of the notions of honor and disgrace – what is truly disgraceful for me as a person is for me to fall short of this ethical conception. An implication is that, when confronting an ethically problematic situation, my attention should be focused on the ethical qualities of the situation and of my response to it.

[11] Zhu (2002b): 1.18b.

[12] Zhu (2002a): 3.10b.

Consider now a situation in which an offender has wrongfully injured a victim. If the victim is a stranger, I might respond with anger at the situation because I care about the ethical norms that have been violated, and perhaps also because I care about the victim as a fellow human. I might be moved to intervene, or take corrective steps.

If the victim is related to me in a special way, say a friend, I might respond with greater emotional intensity because I care about the victim in a special way. I might also feel a greater urgency and special obligation to intervene. This is a matter of differential responses due to the different relations the victim stands to me, something that the Confucians, and we, would endorse.

If the victim is me myself, I might, for the same reason, respond with greater emotional intensity, and feel a greater urgency to defend myself. To the extent that my response is not different in nature from the other two scenarios, this is again a matter of differential responses. As in the other two scenarios, I take a *condemning* attitude toward the behavior of the offender, and I am moved to correct the situation. My attention is focused primarily on the situation as a whole, and on how to properly respond to it.

But my response when I myself am the victim might take a different form. When personally injured, a common human tendency is to magnify the significance of oneself as victim. I place a special significance on the way I am treated by others, and I regard wrongful injury of myself as a personal challenge, affecting my worthiness as a person. My attention is focused on the offender as someone who poses this personal challenge. I take a *combative* attitude toward the offender, and am moved to counter this personal challenge.

The distinction between these two forms of anger when I myself am the victim reflects the Confucian distinction. In the first form of anger, my attention is focused on the ethically problematic situation and on how to appropriately respond to it. My anger is guided entirely by the nature of the situation and the substantive ethical conception by reference to which I determine the appropriate response. In this sense, my anger *pertains to morality*. As the nature of my response is guided entirely by these factors without my adding anything to the response, my anger *resides in things* rather than in me. It is as if my anger is called for by the situation, in the way that an image in a clear mirror is called for by the object it confronts.

In the second form of anger, my attention is focused on the offender as someone who has personally challenged me, and on how to counter this personal challenge. My primary concern is with this supposed challenge to myself, rather than with the ethical quality of the situation as such. In this sense, my anger *pertains to the physical body*. This is a problematic form of anger because our sense of honor and disgrace should not be a matter of how we are treated by others. Instead, it should be a matter of our own ethical qualities, including the way we respond to personal injury. To focus attention on the offender and on how to counter the supposed personal challenge is to inject into my response a certain view of mine that goes beyond a view of the situation as ethically problematic. In this sense, my anger *resides in me*.

This distinction between two forms of anger is not the same as the contemporary philosophical distinction between a first personal and a third personal response of anger. Instead, it is closer to

a distinction built into our ordinary way of speaking, one between our being *more personally involved* and our being *more removed* when responding to a situation of personal injury. This distinction reflects certain familiar experiences, as illustrated by the following examples.

When we are aware of wrongful injury, such as malicious slander of someone, we are angry at what the offender has done, and we take a condemning attitude toward his behavior. Our response intensifies if the victim is more closely related to us. But if the victim happens to be ourselves, the nature of our response often changes, and we become much more personally involved. It is as if we have '*zoomed in*' to the situation, looking combatively at the offender through the eyes of the victim, intent on countering the personal challenge that he has posed.

Moving in the reverse direction, we might initially respond in this combative manner when we have been personally and publicly insulted. But we might come to realize, perhaps with help from a friend, that the offender habitually treats others in this manner. We might even observe him behaving similarly toward others in similar contexts. As a result, we no longer view this particular insulting act of his as carrying any special personal significance, going beyond its being part of his habitual pattern of inconsiderate behavior. We become more removed from his initial insulting act, as if we have '*zoomed out'* of the situation.

The Confucian distinction is closer to this ordinary distinction between a more personally involved and a more removed way of viewing a situation of personal injury. The difference has to do with how we direct attention, our thoughts and sentiments, and how we are moved, and this difference admits of degrees. As we know from our own personal experiences, the move away from the more personally involved form of anger when we ourselves have been injured is a gradual progression that comes with experience in life, rather than a sudden shift from one point of view to another. What the Confucians advocate is that, even when we ourselves are wrongfully injured, our attention should be focused on the ethically problematic situation as a whole and on how to appropriately respond, without placing a special significance on the fact that *we ourselves* have been injured.

We may add two observations about this view of anger. First, while the Confucian view assumes a substantive ethical conception, it does not depend on the specific content of that conception. To see this point, consider an observation found in certain contemporary philosophical discussions, to the effect that wrongful injury violates the entitlements of the victim and contains an implicit 'insulting' message that the victim is not deserving of better treatment.[13] Even if we work with an ethical conception that includes such an observation, that observation can still figure in the victim's perspective in two different ways, resulting in two different forms of anger.

When responding to personal injury, the victim might acknowledge that the wrongful injury violates her entitlements and contains an implicit 'insulting' message, *in the same manner as she would* if the victim were a stranger. It is as if the acknowledgement that she herself is the victim is an after-thought: "the wrongful injury implicitly conveys that the victim is not deserving of better treatment, *and that victim happens to be me*". By contrast, the acknowledgement that she herself is the victim might take on a special significance for her. The violation of her entitlements and the corresponding 'insulting' message are *experienced by her and inform her perspective in*

[13] E.g. Murphy (1988).

a different way. She experiences this insulting message as impinging on her sense of her worthiness as a person, in a way that she would not when responding to wrongful injury of someone else.

What distinguishes the Confucian position is not the content of the ethical conception it works with, but the ideal of ethical purity – namely, that our worthiness as a person should be a matter of our living up to the substantive ethical conception. Even if it is agreed that personal injury carries an implicit 'insulting' message, we should not experience and view it as impinging on our sense of worthiness as a person. Instead, we relate our sense of worthiness to our own ethical qualities, and our attention is focused on how to properly respond to the situation.

The second observation is that, although the Confucians idealize the more removed form of anger, they do not deny that human beings do tend to assign special significance to themselves and respond with the more personally involved form of anger. Their view of what is truly disgraceful is directed exactly against this common tendency. Their view of anger is a normative proposal that takes into account these facts about the human psychology. As a normative proposal, the Confucian view also does not conflict with certain views about child development. It is compatible with the view that the more personally involved form of anger arises earlier in childhood, or that it might play an important role in the learning of ethical judgements. Even if childhood development involves one's moving from being angry in a more personal manner at wrongful injury to oneself, to being angry at wrongful injury to someone else, and then to being angry at certain offending behavior as such, this does not speak against the normative proposal that, for mature adults, one should steer away from anger of the more personally involved form.

As we noted, Strawson distinguishes between resentment and indignation as two forms of anger from two different points of view, describing indignation is a "vicarious analogue" of resentment, and as "resentment on behalf of another". In doing so, he is perhaps thinking of the developmental process, taking the more personally involved form of anger to precede, developmentally, the more removed form of anger. But even if we grant this point, it does not follow that such progression should be characterized as a shift from one point of view to another. After all, even anger at wrongful injury to oneself can undergo a gradual progression over time – we become less personally involved in our responses as we gradually advance in age and experience – and such progression cannot realistically be described as a shift between distinct points of view. There is no reason to adopt the distinction between two points of view in describing the developmental process, just as there is no reason to present the Confucians' normative proposal in terms of that distinction.

4. Compassion

In discussing the Confucian view on compassion, I will assume the notion of *well-being* of humans, and refer to as *harm* an occurrence that is detrimental to someone's well-being in some significant way. As for the term "compassion", I will use it in a broad sense to encompass any kind of other-directed emotional responses that is congruent with some object's condition to which it is a response. Contemporary philosophical discussions of the subject often invoke a distinction between a first person and a third person points of view, and some even interpret the Confucian position in such terms.

Consider, for example, this remark by Mencius:

"My reason for saying that no human is devoid of a heart *sensitive to the suffering of others* is this. Suppose a person were, all of a sudden, to see a young child on the verge of falling into a well. He would certainly be *moved to compassion*…"[14]

Some interpret what Mencius presents as a response of sympathy, understood in terms of one's responding from a 'third person perspective' on harm to another party out of a concern for the other party's well-being. This is supposed to contrast with empathy, which involves seeing things from the harmed party's perspective and having feelings congruent with the other party's emotional state.[15]

Or consider the Confucian view on how we should, ideally, respond to harm to others. Later Confucians present this in terms of an ideal of *one body*. For example, Wang Yangming remarks:

"The benevolent person regards the ten thousand things as his body. One is unable to *form one body with all things* only because one has not eliminated the self-centeredness in oneself."[16]

He also describes how he himself feels the pain of others as if it were pain in his own body:

"At bottom, Heaven, Earth and all things are *my body*. Is there any suffering or bitterness of the great masses that is not disease or pain in *my own body*?"[17]

Some have interpreted this idea of one body in terms of empathy, understood in terms of one's identifying with others and feeling what they feel.[18]

An examination of the language shows that these Confucians' ideas do not fit into these contemporary conceptions. These conceptions assume a perspective that emphasizes the distinctness of individuals and of their respective points of view. But, as in the case of anger, the Confucians conceptualize responses to harm primarily as responses to *situations* involving harm, rather than to the *objects* harmed. Instead of emphasizing the *distinctness* of oneself from the object harmed, their idea of one body emphasizes the *continuity* between one's responses to situations involving harm to oneself and one's responses to situations involving harm to others.

In the remark by Mencius, the expressions "sensitive to the suffering of" and "moved to compassion" are translations of Chinese terms that are, syntactically, directed to situations involving harm, and the responses they convey are directed primarily to such *situations*. The terms have connotations that involve the heart's "being alarmed and negatively affected by" and "feeling pain at" the situation. In addition, it "cannot bear" a situation of this kind, which can involve its being unable to bear witnessing the situation, bringing about the situation, or allowing

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[14] Mencius (2003): 2A:6.
[15] E.g., Darwall (1998): 261, 263-4
[16] Wang (1963): 285.
[17] Wang (1963): 179.
[18] E.g., Slote (2010): 304.

the situation to continue.[19] This kind of responses is not unfamiliar to us – consider, for example, how we would respond when we suddenly see a two year old running into the path of a moving car.

In addition, unlike the English words "sympathy" and "empathy", these Chinese terms describe responses that can be directed to a situation in which I *myself*, not necessarily someone else, undergo the harm – I can be alarmed by and pained at, and cannot bear, a situation involving harm to myself. Note that, even when the harm is to myself and involves actual physical pain, this response of the heart is distinct from the physical pain. Suppose I have been injured under a collapsed building. Apart from the physical pain, there is an additional response of my heart that involves distress at the situation. That distress is directed not just at the pain I currently undergo, but also at the prospect of irreversible injury, or of additional pain caused by the rescue efforts. This point is particularly clear when the physical pain is only anticipated but not present, as when I anticipate with apprehension some painful surgical procedure the next day. Apart from the anticipated future pain, my heart is presently pained and distressed, and finds the situation unbearable.

These responses of the heart exhibit two features, which I will describe as being *intimate* and *unmediated*. First, unlike the kind of responses that stem from a 'third person perspective' and that can take on a more removed form, there is a felt component to these responses that involves the heart's being alarmed, pained, distressed by, and being unable to bear, the situation. The same kind of response can be directed to situations involving harm to myself and so, even when directed to situations involving harm to others, my relation to my response is as close as my relation to my response to a situation involving harm to myself. In this sense, the response has an *intimate* character, and is not some kind of more removed 'third personal' response. What Mencius' example shows is that we can respond to a situation involving harm to another in as *intimate* a fashion as we do to a situation involving harm to ourselves.

Second, the responses are *unmediated* in the sense that they arise immediately upon our coming to be aware of the situation, without being further explained by some other kind of concern. Mencius himself emphasizes this point when presenting his example:

"He would certainly be moved to compassion, not because he wanted to get in the good graces of the parents, nor because he wished to win the praise of his fellow villagers or friends, nor yet because he disliked the cry of the child."

And such responses are not explained by the kind of sympathetic concern described earlier or some general motive of benevolence. One may, of course, ascribe to the person some such concern or motive simply on the basis of the person's responding in this manner. But then such concern or motive is not something that is identified independently of the response and that serves to explain the latter. To the extent that it can be independently identified, one might exhibit such a concern or motive and still not respond in the manner Mencius describes.

The point of Mencius' example is that humans can, under certain conditions, respond to a situation involving harm to others in the same kind of intimate and unmediated fashion in which

[19] See Shun (forthcoming a).

they respond to a situation involving harm to themselves. In this example, the response comes about in the context of our being vividly presented with a situation of imminent harm. That the mode of presentation makes such a difference is familiar to us. Consider, for example, the way our heart is touched when we see TV images of starving children in dismal conditions, or hear young children crying in distress upon losing their parents.

This kind of response can also occur when we stand in a close relation to the object undergoing harm, as in the parent-child relationship. An early Chinese text describes that relationship as follows:

"The way parents relate to children, and children relate to parents, is *like one single body being divided into two*….. That is why they have a *deep connection* to each other even when spatially separated, so that one would come to the relief of the other when the other is in pain or suffering, would share in the worries and longings of the other…"[20]

When a parent becomes aware of severe injury to her child, whether she directly witnesses it or not, she would respond as if it were herself who has been injured. Her heart is pained and alarmed, and she finds unbearable the situation and her not acting to mitigate the situation. She has a "deep connection" to her child, and responds to harm to him as if it were harm to herself.

This kind of response can also occur in contexts in which we have a sense of accountability by virtue of our special positions toward the objects harmed. Confucians illustrate this point with the way certain sagely rulers or officials respond to harm to their subjects, but this point is again familiar to us from our own contemporary experiences. Consider, for example, the pain a school principal would feel when she learns that dozens of her students have been buried alive in an earthquake. Or consider the way we expect the leader of a country to feel for the plight of her people affected by some disaster that involves significant loss of life and injuries.

Aside from these three kinds of special contexts – vivid presentation, close relationship, sense of accountability – highlighted by the Confucians, such responses can also occur in other contexts such as shared experiences. For example, we tend to resonate more closely with someone undergoing some painful medical condition if we ourselves have had similar experiences in the past. However, outside of these kinds of special contexts, humans do not naturally respond in this manner to situations involving harm to others.

This point is again familiar to us. We are more sensitive to harm not just to family members but also to members of our local community, but we might become indifferent to harm to total strangers in far off lands apparently unrelated to us. We are more sensitive to harm to those for whom we feel a sense of accountability by virtue of our social or official positions, but we might be indifferent to efforts at environmental conservation because we do not see ourselves as accountable to future generations. And we might be indifferent to the suffering of victims of war and famine, until we see graphic images of their plight on TV. This is why it is good educational experience for children from developed countries to spend some time in developing countries to gain a more personal understanding of what a life of deprivation is like.

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[20] *The Annals of Lu Buwei* (1988): 9.17b.

What the Confucian ideal of one body advocates is that we sensitize our heart to expand the scope of its sensitivity to make it no longer dependent on these special contexts. Ideally, we should respond in this intimate and unmediated fashion to situations involving harm to any, taking into account the differential responses due to different relations. This does not mean that we can, or should, always act on such responses. Still, even when it is not possible, or not appropriate, to so act, it is a deficiency for the heart to lack such sensitivity. And sometimes, when it is not appropriate to act on such responses, this can provide grounds for mitigating the responses. This happens when, for example, we avoid visual contact with a needed surgical operation on a family member, so as to avoid the resulting pain and distress of the heart. But the mitigation of the responses should be grounded in some sense of what is appropriate – in this case, the medical necessity for the surgical operation. The absence of such responses should not be due to a general lack of sensitivity of the heart, nor due to extraneous considerations such as prejudice against the individual harmed.

Although I have talked about the Chinese language when discussing the nature of this kind of responses, such responses are conveyed by familiar English expressions such as "I am pained and distressed by what happened", or "I cannot bear to see this continue". But these are not the kind of locutions that contemporary philosophical discussions focus on. Instead, the focus has been on such expressions as "sympathy", "empathy", "projective imagination", or "perspective taking". Our discussion shows that this kind of responses to harm do not fit into these contemporary philosophical conceptions.

As we saw, the responses can be directed to situations involving harm to oneself, not just to others, and so they are not responses of sympathy understood as responses from some more removed 'third person perspective'. The same is true of the conception of empathy, understood in certain specific senses. The term "empathy" is used in different ways by philosophers and psychologists. Some regard it as a matter of having feelings and emotions that are congruent with, and causally linked to, those of the other party. Some take it to also involve one's imaginatively projecting oneself into the perspective of the other party, responding imaginatively from her perspective. Other fine distinctions include distinguishing between cognitive and experiential purposes in this exercise of perspective taking, and between what oneself would have experienced in that situation as opposed to what the other party might be experiencing.[21]

That these specific conceptions of empathy do not describe this kind of responses is not just because such responses might be directed to situations involving prospective or actual harm that the other party is not aware of. Even if she is aware of the harm, the response under consideration does not, in itself, involve one's sharing her mental states or projecting oneself into her perspective. Instead, the response is based on one's own understanding of the *situation* that the harmed party is in. The situation might include the negative mental states of the other party, and one takes that into account, but the response itself need not involve sharing similar mental states.

[21] See Batson (2010): chapter 1 for a helpful overview of these different uses of the term "empathy".

Admittedly, as in Wang Yangming's remark cited earlier, Confucians do speak of one's being pained by the pain of others as if it were pain in one's own body. But the point is not that we imaginatively project ourselves into the other party's perspective and share her pain. The point is rather that our heart is sensitized in such a way that it responds to situations involving harm and resulting pain to another party, in the same intimate and unmediated manner that it would respond to situations involving comparable harm and resulting pain to ourselves.

The reason why this kind of responses do not fit into the contemporary conceptions of sympathy and empathy, nor the distinction between first and third person, is similar to the reason why the Confucian view of anger cannot be described in terms of such a distinction. In the case of anger, the focus is on the way we respond to *situations* involving wrongful injury, and the distinction between *my* being injured and *someone else's* being injured is not highlighted. Similarly, in the case of compassion, the focus is on the way we respond to *situations* involving harm, and the distinction between *my* being harmed and *someone else's* being harmed – and correspondingly the distinction between the perspective of the observing party and that of the harmed party – is not highlighted. On the contrary, the proposal is that I should respond in the same intimate and unmediated manner to situations in which someone else has been harmed, as I do to a comparable situation in which I myself has been harmed, albeit with differentiation due to different relations.

The distinction between first and third person emphasizes the *distinctness* of the responder from the harmed party. By contrast, this alternative perspective emphasizes the *connectedness* between the two parties. A paradigmatic example of such responses is the way a parent responds to harm to her child. Her response does not stem from a more removed 'third person perspective', nor is it a matter of projecting herself into the 'first person perspective' of her child and sharing his mental states. After all, the child might not be aware of the harm himself. And even if he is, her distress depends only on *her own* understanding of his situation, not on her projecting herself into her child's perspective. To her, it is as if she and her child are *connected* "like a single body divided into two". The ideal of one body advocates that we sensitize our heart so that we have the same sense of *connectedness* to all humans.

The emphasis on distinctness underlies other ideas found in contemporary philosophical discussions. For example, some have described a compassionate response as something that promotes a sense of equality; in so responding, we regard what happened to the other party as something that could also happen to ourselves.[22] Without implying that the Confucians deny that humans are equal, this sense of equality is not part of the kind of responses they idealize. When the parent responds to harm to her child, her perspective is not that her child is equally human like herself, but that he is connected to her as if part of her own body. The emphasis is on this *connectedness*, not on herself and her child being *distinct but equal* beings.

The emphasis on distinctness has also led to a puzzlement about how one human can feel and be moved by the pain and suffering that another undergoes. Some have proposed that the two parties must be, in some deeper metaphysical sense, actually one despite appearances.[23] Others, who reject this metaphysical view, have proposed instead that the responding party must have

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[22] Blum (1980): 511-2.

[23] Schopenhauer (2005).

imaginatively projected herself into the other's perspective in order to so respond.[24] The puzzlement is generated by the presumption that the other party is directly linked to his own pain, both epistemologically and motivationally, in a way that I am not linked to his pain. So, it seems, for me to be moved by his pain, some kind of link must be established between the two of us as distinct individuals, whether through metaphysical identity or through imaginative projection.

This puzzlement does not arise on the picture we presented. On this alternative picture, the emphasis is on responses of the heart to *situations* involving harm to another, and this does not involve my actually feeling and being moved by the pain and suffering of the other. There is no similar presumption that he is directly linked to a *situation* involving harm to himself, epistemologically or motivationally, in a way that I am not linked to that same situation. Indeed, as illustrated by Mencius' example, I might even be aware of a situation involving harm to him even if he himself is not aware of it. And it is this awareness of the situation that triggers the kind of response that characterizes the sense of connectedness.

Although the notions of sympathy and empathy, understood in certain specific senses, do not describe the kind of responses under consideration, these notions can also be understood in a very broad sense. For example, some have characterized empathy in terms of other-directed emotional responses congruent with another's situation, where congruence implies only that one responds positively or negatively in accordance with whether the well-being of the other party is positively or negatively affected, without implying that one's feelings match those of the other.[25] Construed broadly in this manner, the kind of responses under consideration can be described in such terms. Indeed, in referring to the Confucian position as their view on compassion, I have been using the term "compassion" in exactly this broad sense. But this does not affect the point that it is misleading to describe the Confucian position in terms of the more specific notions.

5. The Distinction between First and Third Person

In relation to anger, Confucians acknowledge a common human tendency to ascribe special significance to oneself by viewing wrongful injury of oneself in a special way, resulting in the more personally involved form of anger. In relation to compassion, they acknowledge a common human tendency to downplay the significance of others by being insufficiently sensitive to situations involving harm to others. In both cases, they advocate our becoming the kind of person for whom the distinction between oneself and others no longer carry such special significance.

Their rejection of any special significance to this distinction explains why it is misleading to characterize their position in terms of the distinction between first and third person. If we invoke that distinction, it would appear that the Confucian view on anger advocates a move away from a first person toward a third person perspective, even when one is personally injured. And it would appear that their ideal of one body advocates an extension of the first person perspective from oneself to others when responding to situations involving harm to others. That it results in a

[24] E.g., Cartwright (2008).

[25] Batson (2010): 11

description of the Confucian position as advocating moves in opposite directions illustrates the artificiality in trying to characterize the Confucian position in terms of that distinction. That distinction assumes some distinction of significance between my response to a situation in which *I myself* am affected and my response when *someone else* is similarly affected. But the Confucian position opposes assigning any special significance to this distinction, a point they often convey in terms of the idea of *no self*.[26]

On this alternative picture, instead of working with a categorical distinction between two points of view, we allow for variations in our responses – the way we direct attention, our thoughts and sentiments, our motivations, etc. – that depend on various factors. The variations may be a function of my different relations to the affected party, who may be my child, friend, student, or just some total stranger; my response when I myself am affected is, in the ideal case, just another variation along that same spectrum. In the non-ideal case, when I myself am affected, the variations can be a function of the kind of person I am. This is a fact familiar to us. Different individuals respond differently to comparable situations involving wrongful injuries to themselves, depending on the kind of person they are. And each of us, looking back to our own past, usually see a progression in our responses as we advance in age and experience – we become less personally involved and impulsive, and more able to step back and cope with the situation in a calm and measured manner. These variations, which admits of degrees, cannot be adequately captured in terms of a shift from one point of view to another.

Although our discussion has focused on anger and compassion, the argument can be extended to other areas. Consider gratitude, which Strawson cites as another example of a "personal reactive attitude".[27] Suppose we say, roughly, that gratitude involves not just some sense of appreciation for benefits bestowed out of good will, but also some sense of obligation to respond, minimally to convey one's appreciation and, beyond that, to reciprocate in some appropriate manner that demonstrates one's appreciation. It appears that, unlike anger and compassion, gratitude is a response that one might have only when oneself has been so benefitted; at least, it appears that gratitude is out of place when the benefitted party is some total stranger. Does this mean, then, that gratitude involves some distinctive first person point of view?

Let us start by considering some instances in which gratitude appears in order even when the benefitted party is not oneself, such as when the benefitted party is closely related to oneself in a way that one has an overall caring relation to that party. For example, a parent might feel gratitude to someone for comforting her child after he has been injured and is awaiting medical help. In this case, the nature of her gratitude is not that different from her gratitude to someone who has similarly benefitted herself – it would be artificial to describe her as responding from two distinct points of view in the two cases.

Consider next the way one would respond if one's student has been benefitted. Whether gratitude is appropriate appears dependent on the nature of the benefit. I feel gratitude to a professional colleague, who does not have a special supervising relation to my graduate student, for supervising him when I am on leave or for advising him as an exchange student. But it might

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[26] See Shun (2018) for a discussion of this idea.

[27] Strawson (1974): 4.

seem odd to say that I feel gratitude to someone for comforting my student after he has been injured. The reason appears to be that gratitude is a response to bestowed benefit in a certain area of life to the extent that one stands in a special caring relation to the beneficiary in respect to that area of life. We stand in that special caring relation to ourselves and our children without regard to any specific area of life, but a teacher stands in that relation to a student primarily in relation to the latter's intellectual development.

If this is right, it would explain why gratitude appears out of place when the benefitted party is some total stranger unrelated to us – we do not stand in a special caring relation to the stranger. Even if we agree that each human should have some caring relation to other humans as such, this is not a special kind of caring relation in that only I, along with some selected others, stand in that relation to some specific individual. Though I also care about that stranger who has been benefitted, I do not stand in a special caring relation to her.

This line of thought assumes that gratitude depends on a special caring relation to the benefitted party, but some might challenge this assumption. Perhaps gratitude depends only on some caring relation as such, of a kind that extends to total strangers. I might, for example, feel gratitude to the riot police for having responded in a restrained manner to a protest that has turned violent. I do not personally know the youths involved, but I am relieved that they have been spared of more severe injuries. If gratitude depends only on some caring relation as such, then it would make sense for me to feel gratitude for benefits bestowed on total strangers, to the extent that I care about them.

Whether the term "gratitude" maybe used in this manner is an issue that we need not settle for present purposes. What the discussion of these examples shows is that the reason why it might seem odd to speak of gratitude for benefits bestowed on some stranger is that I do not stand in some appropriate relation to that stranger, whether a caring relation in general or some special caring relation in the relevant area of life. What makes it odd is not that gratitude is tied to a certain distinctive point of view that I can take up only when I myself am directly affected. Since it would be appropriate to respond with gratitude to situations involving benefits to different parties, including myself, my child, my student, even total strangers, as long as I stand in the relevant caring relation to the affected party, it seems artificial to tie gratitude to some such point of view. As in the case of anger, the gratitude involved in these different situations varies along different dimensions, including my thoughts and sentiments, what (if anything) I feel compelled to do to demonstrate my appreciation, etc., but these are not differences having to do with two distinct points of view.

So far, we have focused on responses to specific situations that we encounter, but we also stand in more enduring relations to our environment. My anger or gratitude might persist in such a way that it is not tied to a specific situation but is directed to an individual as such, whether because of the continuing effect of a single incident or because of a pattern of behavior of that individual. And my compassionate response to a specific situation might, and often, stem from a more enduring sense of connectedness to, or caring for, the individual involved. What I care about,

what I feel connected to, is that individual, not a specific situation.[28] Since these more enduring relations are focused on individuals rather than specific situations, a related question is whether the distinction between first and third person might be more suited to describing these enduring relations.

It will not be possible to fully address this question here, but a negative answer is partly implicit in our discussion of anger and compassion. Just as the responses to specific situations can vary along different dimensions, rather than fitting into a distinction between two distinct points of view, the same is true of our more enduring relation to individuals. Our sense of connectedness or caring relation to others vary along different dimensions depending on my different relationship to them. It falls along a continuum – ourselves, our children, our students, etc. – and it would be artificial to draw a distinction between two distinct points of view somewhere along that continuum, wherever we locate that distinction.

Anger directed to someone on an enduring basis derives from past occurrences involving different factors. It may have to do with injury to myself or to someone else, or both, and it may be a matter of a particularly grievous injury or a pattern of injurious behavior. The nature of the injurious act(s) and my relation to the injured party varies, and the anger may be directed to someone – such as a government leader – who has committed some particularly grievous act of injustice or cruelty without our knowing who specifically have been injured. There will be corresponding variations along different dimensions in the more enduring anger I have toward that individual, and such variations are also a function of the kind of person I am. In the context of all these possible variations, it appears artificial to fit the different forms that anger can take into two distinct kinds, one first personal and the other third personal. Whether the individual injured is myself or someone else is just one of the many factors affecting the form my anger takes, and there appears no reason to give special significance to this one factor among others.

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[28] I am indebted to Nicolas Bommarito for a comment, during my presentation of related ideas at the University of Buffalo on April 4, 2019, that highlighted this point.

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