Ethical Practitioners and Intellectual Commentators

(Response to Commentators)

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I am grateful to the commentators for their thoughtful comments. Space limitation prevents responding to many of these comments, and I will focus on some themes that clarify the nature of the project. In the final footnote of my paper, I summarize its main point saying that the distinction between first and third person may be suited for certain philosophical purposes but not for the purpose of "a description of *ordinary* and *familiar* experiences", referring to another paper in this connection (Shun 2021). I will draw on this other paper to explain the difference in purposes.

1. Two Modes of Ethical Reflection

Suppose we refer to considerations regarding desirable versus undesirable ways for humans to live as *ethical considerations*, and describe anyone exhibiting sensitivity and/or responsiveness to such considerations as being engaged in *ethical practice.* For convenience, I will refer to those engaged in ethical practice as "*ethical practitioners*". Ethical practitioners include ordinary people we encounter in all walks of life, such as bus drivers and hospital workers, as well as people in other times and cultures, including the millions past and present without the privilege of education.

Certain ethical traditions, such as Buddhism and Confucianism, are primarily concerned with making a direct difference to the ethical practice of ordinary people. Their focus is on *familiar* ethical situations that *ordinary* humans confront on a day-to-day basis. Though humans do occasionally encounter unusual ethical dilemmas, these are not the norm. The ethical challenges they more often confront are such matters as how to cope with hardship and loss, or how to counter tendencies at pridefulness or impulsiveness. The challenge is a matter of how to manage their own psychology in a way that enables them to respond appropriately, not just in action, but in thoughts and sentiments, in motivations, and in the way they direct attention. Reflecting on these familiar challenges leads to general accounts of the human condition such as certain common psychological influences and how these can be managed. Given their practical purpose, an important part of these accounts is directed to understanding *the perspective of ordinary people* on the way they respond to their environment.

This emphasis on the perspective of ordinary people need not be tied to the immediate practical concern of these traditions, and is shared by many intellectuals across cultures. In literature, authors might seek to depict the perspective of ordinary humans in certain areas of life, in a more vivid fashion but without thoughts of making a direct practical difference, though some might as with Tolstoy's short stories written after his spiritual transformation. In professional philosophy, authors such as Iris Murdoch demonstrates a similar interest in her often cited M and D example, which describes elements of the way a mother-in-law views her daughter-in-law that, as Murdoch emphasizes, are "exceedingly familiar" to us as ordinary humans. The importance of attending to ordinary people, not just intellectuals, is also emphasized by intellectuals across cultures. Tagore observes how it is "people of scanty learning" who truly understand the significance of life, while Tolstoy likewise emphasizes how truly understanding human life involves attending to "the poor, simple, unlettered folk" rather than the "few hundred" learned people like himself.

Next, suppose we refer to as an *intellectual commentator* someone who, in reflecting on our ethical lives, makes certain reflective observations about the *ethical practitioner*. The commentator's observations might derive from two kinds of interests. He might primarily be interested in understanding *the perspective of the practitioner* – the way she experiences and responds to her environment, and the way she herself views such responses. He seeks to get close to the way she actually sees things, and for his observations to be recognizable by her as indeed describing her perspective, he would ensure that these observations are presented or can be explained in plain non-specialized language intelligible to her, without having to coach her in some sophisticated theoretical account. I will refer to this as a *practitioner-based* mode of reflection.

By contrast, the commentator's interest might primarily be in addressing certain intellectual agendas shared within an intellectual community, *agendas other than describing the perspective of the practitioner*. The commentator need not be a philosopher, but could be a psychologist, physiologist, or sociologist, explaining such human responses as anger or compassion in terms of some psychological, physiological, or evolutionary account that can be grasped only by those with the relevant intellectual training. I will refer to this as a *commentator-based* mode of reflection.

This is a distinction between two modes of reflection and correspondingly two kinds of comments about the practitioner, *not* between two kinds of commentators. The same commentator might engage in both modes of reflection and make both kinds of comments. For example, some of a commentator's reflective observations about a certain virtue might describe the virtuous person's perspective on things, while other observations provide an account of the social value of the virtue that is not part of her perspective. Even if the virtuous person is a reflective thinker who endorses the latter observations, these observations are not part of the perspective she has by virtue of being virtuous (Shun 2018: 101).

Given their different purposes, there should not be a presumption that commentator-based accounts also describe the perspective of practitioners, and often they do not. For example,

psychological, physiological and evolutionary accounts typically do not describe the perspective of ordinary people on their own responses of anger or compassion. For the same reason, conceptual frameworks that originate in a commentator-based mode of reflection should not be used to describe the perspective of practitioners unless their suitability can be independently established through an examination of the actual perspective of practitioners. To do so without this further justification runs the risk of distorting that perspective, and this move involves what I will call a *conflation of purposes*. The tendency at conflation is not uncommon in the philosophical literature.

For example, consider the idea of equal intrinsic worth of humans that plays an important role in legal, social and political thought with obvious practical significance. As a *normative* proposal, we might advocate propagating the idea so that it is more broadly shared. But it is a conflation of purposes to invoke that idea to *describe* the familiar experiences of ordinary people, such as when forgiveness is presented as a matter of regaining conviction in a belief in one's egalitarian moral status, or modesty in terms of a belief that the equal worth of humans is more significant than differences resulting from individual accomplishments. Forgiveness and modesty are phenomena shared across times and cultures, and people in other times and cultures do not share this philosophical idea, not necessarily because they do not believe humans are equal since such a belief can take other forms. Even for those who do share this idea, the belief about equal worth typically does not describe the perspective they have by virtue of being forgiving or modest.

When this conflation of purposes happens, it threatens to, as Murdoch puts it, "theorize away" certain obvious facts about our familiar ethical experiences in that we lose sight of such facts. Returning to the project at hand, the main claim of my paper is that, while highlighting the distinction between first and third person might be suited for certain commentator-based purposes, it is not suited for describing the perspective of ordinary people on such familiar experiences as anger and compassion.

Three points of clarification are in order. First, my paper presents the commentator-based mode of reflection as characterizing only *certain strands* of contemporary philosophizing. There are other strands that, as David Wong also notes, are more in line with the emphasis on the perspective of ordinary people. Aside from Murdoch and Blum whom Wong cites, other examples include the feminine emphasis on caring or Williams' idea of "one thought too many".

Second, the paper's concern is only with the conflation of purposes and not with commentator-based strands as such. These strands are important for their own purposes, not just because there are ethical issues that cannot be addressed by attending to the perspective of ordinary people, such as social, political, and legal issues. Even without these practical implications, this other mode of reflection, also found in such disciplines as psychology or sociology, conduces to other kinds of intellectual understanding valuable in their own rights. The two modes of reflection are complementary rather than competing, and on this I differ from certain internal critical voices such as Murdoch's criticism of contemporary moral philosophy of her times or criticisms framed in such terms as "anti-theory".

Third, just as both strands are present in contemporary philosophizing, commentator-based strands are present in Chinese ethical traditions along with practitioner-based strands. There are, for example, strands in Buddhism and Confucianism that are often referred to as their "metaphysical" views and that do not describe the perspective of ordinary people. But within these traditions, there is conscious awareness of the distinct purposes of the two strands and, as a result, less likelihood of conflation. Zhu Xi, whose so-called "metaphysical views" are likely the most elaborate among Confucians, explicitly states that these elements of his thinking are of "secondary significance" as they are not part of the perspective one has by virtue of being ethical and do not conduce to that perspective. Wang Yangming, like the Chan Buddhists, consciously stays away from this kind of reflection which he regards as a distraction from genuine ethical concerns.

2. <u>Strawson's Distinction Between Two Points of View</u>

The paper's claim is that *highlighting* the distinction between first and third person, viz. between situations in which the responder is or is not directly affected, may be suited for certain *commentator-based purposes* but not for the *purpose of understanding the perspective of practitioners*. Strawson distinguishes between two points of view on the basis of that distinction, and Jay Wallace's account further develops Strawson's ideas.

On this account, there are norms governing the relation between individuals who have obligations to and claims against each other. Certain wrongful actions can flout the claim that an individual holds against the agent, and there is a certain kind of attitude only available to someone who occupies this position, not to an unaffected third party. This is the basis for the contrast between resentment and indignation as two kinds of angry reactions to wrongdoing, the former available only to the directly affected party and the latter to the unaffected third party. Only the directly affected party has warrants or a privileged normative basis for the personal attitude of resentment. The unaffected party can respond only with anger with an impersonal character.

I agree that Wallace's account is likely continuous with an important aspect of Strawson's views, given Strawson's own concern with responsible agency. On this account, the distinction between two points of view serves certain purposes related to the commentator's interest in the normative relation between individuals. My proposal is that it is not suited for another kind of purpose.

Suppose a young person approaches us, inspired to personal improvement but troubled by his occasional bouts of anger, seeking help and willing to stay in contact. Presenting him with the Strawson-Wallace account will not be of practical help to him. Instead, we will likely invite him to describe a specific instance in which he believes he has been inappropriately angry, what the situation was like, how he reacted, what his thoughts were and what he was focusing on when so reacting. After some probing, we might offer a range of advice. We might advise him to not

focus too much on one particular aspect of the situation, point out other aspects that he did not pay sufficient attention to but doing which might alter his thoughts about what transpired, and alert him to the fact that he might be biased by certain preconceptions in viewing a certain aspect of the situation in the way he did. We would, in the language I have been using, be talking to him about the *relevant features of the situation* and the *psychological dynamics* of his at work, helping him understand both as well as the *interplay* between them.

Suppose next that, being more experienced in life, we regularly advise others in this connection. And being deeply reflective and well-learned, we decide to put together more systematically what we have learnt from these activities, for the benefit of future generations. The resulting treatise on anger – of the kind we would expect from a Buddhist or Confucian master – will comment on the complexities of the various considerations at work in situations to which people are prone to respond with anger ("the relevant features of the situation"), and the different ways in which people's responses are shaped by their own psychological characteristics, especially tendencies that often prompt one to respond impulsively or in other ways inappropriately, leading to anguish and persistent ill feeling ("the psychological dynamics"). An important part of this treatise will focus on understanding *the perspective of practitioners* when they actually respond with anger. Not only will it not take the form of the Strawson-Wallace account, but structuring the treatise around the distinction between two points of view will result in our losing sight of all the complexities that have been mentioned.

This treatise is a *practitioner-based account* of anger that need not be essentially tied to the practical activities just described and that we today can still recognize as containing useful insights into the responses of anger that permeate human lives. Its nature is different from *commentator-based accounts* of anger that serve other intellectual purposes, such as an account in terms of brain functions or in evolutionary terms, or the Strawson-Wallace account. The conceptual apparatus suited for these other accounts are generally not suited for a practitioner-based account, and this is the paper's claim about Strawson's distinction between two points of view. But as it happens, the distinction has not uncommonly been invoked in contexts that concern the perspective of practitioners.

This move has its seeds in Strawson's own summary:

"*I have considered from two points of view* the demands we make on others and our reactions to their possibly injurious actions. These were *the points of view of one* whose interest was directly involved … and *of others* whose interest was not directly involved …" (Strawson p. 15, my emphasis)

In the first sentence, the distinction is between two points of view *from which he himself* considers the said demands and reactions. It is important *from his perspective as a commentator with a certain intellectual agenda* to draw such a distinction. In the second sentence, the two points of view are ascribed to two kinds of responders who, in his words, react – it is now a distinction between *two points of view from which a responder might react,* depending on whether the responder is or is not directly involved.

The two locutions have different implications. A commentator with a special interest in legal considerations might *assess from a legal point of view* what is available to the wronged party in a legal violation, what she has warrant or a privileged legal basis for doing. But for she herself to *react from a legal point of view*, she would not just be making this kind of assessment, but would be reacting in a way in which legal considerations become dominant, such as actually initiating legal proceedings.

In moving from the first to the second locution, Strawson has shifted the focus from the perspective of himself as a commentator to the perspective of the responder herself. This move is still not an issue if we keep clearly in mind that the significance of the distinction between two points of view is *entirely relative to the commentator's own intellectual agenda* – it is important to him as commentator to single out, from among many different kinds of angry reactions to wrongdoing, two specific kinds that help him make his intellectual point. The move becomes problematic if the distinction is decoupled from that agenda and treated as if it were a useful distinction for *our reflective understanding of the perspective of responders as such*, as if angry reactions to wrongdoing were all from either one or the other point of view depending on whether the responder is directly involved.

And this move is not uncommon in the literature. For example, in certain discussions that invoke Strawson's distinction between resentment and indignation as respectively a "personal" and an "impersonal" form of anger, resentment is understood in terms of insecure self-esteem, a defiant affirmation of one's standing in face of treatment that one mistakenly believes calls it into question. This way of developing Strawson's ideas is clearly different from Wallace's. Resentment is now a form of insecurity rather than a normatively based reaction, and the focus is now on the responder's own perspective – her sense of insecurity – when she so reacts. But once the focus shifts to the perspective of the responder, highlighting the distinction creates the impression that angry reactions to wrongdoing take one form or another depending on whether one is directly involved, an impression reinforced by the often-mentioned distinction between "personal anger" and "impersonal anger". This does not do justice to the complex varieties of angry reactions to wrongdoing by ordinary people, and the examples in my paper are intended to demonstrate this point.

3. Anger

To understand these complexities, we need to start with a framework that involves viewing anger as a response to a situation with many potentially relevant features. Furthermore, the nature of the response is shaped by the interplay between these features and the responder's own psychological dynamics. This proposal is compatible with all the key elements of the Strawson-Wallace account. It does not exclude the use of the word "object" in the sense of being the "object of wrongful conduct", and it does not deny that being the object of the wrongdoing provides one with a privileged normative basis for a special kind of response. Everything

Wallace says about the examples in my paper – theft of a car, reckless driving, etc. – are all consistent with the paper's main claims.

Wallace's and my accounts differ only because of the different purposes. Wallace's emphasis is on a certain special kind of response available only to the object of wrongdoing, while my emphasis is on the complex varieties of responses to wrongdoing that ordinary people exhibit even to comparable situations. Highlighting this special kind of response serves Wallace's purpose, but for a commentator primarily interested in understanding the *actual responses of ordinary people as they themselves see it*, this kind of response is just one among many different kinds of responses that an object of wrongdoing might exhibit.

Wallace raises two questions about the idea of responding to situations. The first is framed in terms of what one is "angry at" or what the "target" of one's anger is, and in terms of the "oppositional character" of anger. On his reading, the paper proposes that "we should detach anger entirely from its target, and think of it as an attitude that is directed entirely toward a situation rather than an individual", as a result of which it would lose its "oppositional character".

My paper's point about responding to situations is a simple observation that ordinary people would agree with. When we respond with anger, compassion, or gratitude, we are responding to something that has happened, some state of affairs that has obtained, some occurrence that has taken place; we do not just respond without anything happening. I take it Wallace would agree with this basic point as he also says that anger "has both a target and an occasion or ground", where the occasion or ground is framed in terms of "on account of something that (the target of the anger) has done" – here, that person's having done something is the situation to which the anger is a response.

Although I sometimes put this same point in terms of anger being "directed to" the situation, I have not used the locutions "being angry at" and "target of one's anger" in relation to situations. These locutions carry additional connotations regarding how the responder is directing her attention, what is salient to her among the features of the situation, how she structures her energy in what she does in response, her sentiments about the parties or institutions involved, etc. The paper's point is that all these variables are a function of the interplay between her own psychological characteristics and relevant features of the situation. It does not mean that anger is detached from any target, only that what the "target" is and how the "oppositional" energies are directed are all functions of that complex interplay.

As illustration, consider the outrage many felt in response to the killing of George Floyd, going beyond family and friends, beyond fellow African Americans. Whether we call that outrage "anger" is a terminological issue – an eyewitness might speak of his anger to his family that night, but decline to use the word on the witness stand to avoid playing into the hands of the defense. But that outrage certainly has a better claim to the word "anger" than the kind of indignation and blame discussed in the philosophical literature.

What then is the target of that anger, and around what does its oppositional force revolve? The answer clearly depends on who the responder is. Potential targets of one's anger, in the sense of

something on which one focuses attention, include: the police officer, the racist sentiments in the nation, a political leader viewed as responsible for spurring on such sentiments, the police and entrenched police practices, systemic racism built into political institutions, aspects of the nation's history including the practice of slavery, etc. And the responder's oppositional energies can revolve around different directions: appropriate guilty verdict and sentencing of the officer, reform of the police force, fundamental reform of political institutions, measures to assist minorities groups and address their grievances, etc. Clearly, how one's attention is focused, what is more salient to one, how one's energies are revolved, depend on who the responder is and the psychological dynamics at work. The anger of a close family member, of a fellow African-American, of protesting students pushing for police and other reforms, or of someone writing opinion pieces condemning the racist sentiments, takes different forms. Correspondingly, what might appropriately be described as the "target" of one's anger also varies. In the ordinary use of the word "target", it would be odd to say that the police officer, the wrongdoer in this particular instance, must be the target of the anger of all these groups and that their oppositional attitudes are all directed toward this wrongdoer.

This example also illustrates the answer to Wallace's other question, namely, "how there could be specifically angry responses to situations that are not implicitly targeted at persons". My paper does mention responses of anger that are focused not on specific individuals but on an overall situation that one sees a need to correct – what needs to be done to the specific wrongdoer is viewed only as part of what is involved in correcting the larger situation. I have in mind responses like the outrage that many not in any special relation to Floyd, like the protesting students, feel after the killing, seeing not only the need for justice in this single incident, but also present cultural and institutional problems that need to be corrected as well as past failings that await redress. That the officer receives the appropriate verdict and sentence is just one of many pieces that need to be in place. It does not seem an ordinary use of these expressions to say that the students' outrage is "targeted at" or that they are "anger at" the officer. If we are to identify a single target, racial injustice seems a more appropriate candidate. And the sentiment involved is not the kind of sadness and sorrow that Wallace refers to – the way the responders' emotional resources are engaged, the strong and persistent energies they put into seeking remedy, the sternness of words and action, are all typical manifestations of anger in the ordinary sense. One might, of course, say that all the problems, present and past, are results of human acts and hence that the many agents involved, known or unknown, present or past, are all implicit "targets" of the outrage. This is largely a terminological point and does not affect the substantive issue.

Due to space limitation, I will defer discussion of insults and of injury in the context of personal relationships, on which both Wallace and David Wong comment, to future occasions.

4. **Gratitude**

In relation to gratitude, Daniel Telech raises an important point, which is actually the consideration that led to the present project. He points out something apparently perplexing when

we place the discussion of gratitude alongside that of anger – the former takes what he calls an "expansive route" and the latter a "restrictive route". I noted this apparent asymmetry in another paper when discussing anger and compassion, and pointed out that the apparent asymmetry is generated by our working with the distinction between first and third person. There, I stopped with the observation that Confucian thinkers do not work with this distinction (Shun 2018: 103-104).

But even so, it *appears* that they and contemporary philosophers are talking about *the same subject matter* – anger and compassion. And if the distinction makes sense in the context of the latter's philosophical explorations, then, even if the former does not work with that distinction, it *appears* that we should be able to bring the two together to figure out which provides us with a more promising account. At this point, the source of the apparent perplexity becomes clear – it is generated by the unqualified observation about "the same subject matter". While this is true in one sense, in another sense they are talking about something very different by virtue of doing something fundamentally different with the apparently same subject matters (a point that should be obvious if we also consider physiological accounts). This observation led to the distinction between two modes of ethical reflection that I explored in a subsequent paper (Shun 2021), and the present project brings that discussion back to bear on anger and compassion. Once we shift to a practitioner-based mode of reflection, the apparent perplexity dissipates because there is no further reason to highlight the distinction between first and third person, and hence no longer the appearance of asymmetry in the treatment of the two phenomena.

5. Compassion

As with anger, the paper's claim in relation to compassion is that highlighting the distinction between first and third person might be suited for certain commentator-related purposes but not for understanding the perspective of practitioners. It states a concern with an "*emphasis* on distinctness" between the responder and the affected party, and both Dobin Choi and David Wong raise an important question regarding the nature of this concern. The distinctness it refers to is the kind that ordinary people draw, and it does not deny the relevance of such distinctness. It is not downplaying the relevance of what Choi calls "object-based distinctions" nor opposing distinctness understood in some "relevant sense", as Wong puts it. And it does not deny any of the facts that Choi and Wong mention in regard to personal relations. To illustrate the nature of this concern with the *emphasis* on distinctness, I will reframe the examples in the paper in terms of the distinction between commentator-based and practitioner-based comments.

Consider our response to a situation involving harm to another and our response to a situation involving comparable harm to ourselves. In the literature, certain philosophical questions are raised about the former but not the latter. How is compassion possible, given that the responder and the affected party are distinct parties? This perplexity focuses on the *distinctness* of the responder and the affected party, as no similar question is raised when the two are identical. Thus, in raising this question, a certain kind of significance is assigned to that distinctness

relative to the commentator's interest in a certain kind of understanding of the phenomenon of compassion, whether as a philosopher, psychologist, or physiologist. This is a *commentator-based* agenda, and there should be no presumption that the answer to the question also describes the practitioner's own perspective. For example, an answer in terms of the physiological underpinnings of compassionate responses would clearly not be part of the that perspective.

But a philosophical commentator might frame the answer in terms that already impute the answer to the practitioner's perspective. This happens when the answer is framed in terms of some kind of imaginative participation in the suffering of the affected or in terms of some cognition of metaphysical unity. This is a reference to the imagination or cognition of the responder, not of the commentator, and so the commentator, in answering his own intellectual question, has now imputed certain conceptions to the perspective of the responder that is not based on an examination of her own perspective. The *commentator* assigns a special significance to the distinctness of the two parties as he thinks that it generates a gap that needs to be bridged, but he presents his answer as if the *responder* were herself, from her own perspective, engaged in some psychological exercise that bridges this gap. But what has been imputed would not be recognizable by her as part of her perspective – when she responds with alarm to the sight of an imminently endangered child, she does not engage in any imaginative exercise nor have a cognition of some kind of metaphysical unity. While still recognizing that she and the child are distinct in an ordinary sense, she does not see, from her perspective, that distinctness as generating a gap that needs to be psychologically bridged. In imputing his answer to the perspective of the responder, the commentator is thereby imputing to her *his own emphasis* on the distinctness that is not part of her perspective.

The paper's reference to sympathy and empathy makes the same point. That reference is not directed against any of the contemporary philosophical and psychological accounts of the subject, but against the use of these notions, when "understood in certain senses", to describe the responder's perspective. Consider, for example, an account of sympathy as a response from a "third-person perspective" based on one's caring about others' goods, and an account of empathy as involving some kind of imaginative exercise. These accounts might be legitimate relative to the respective commentator's own intellectual agendas. But both have been invoked in relation to Mencius, in particular his example of the child.

I have shown on philological grounds that Mencius is saying something entirely different (Shun 2020). What he describes is how the human heart is alarmed, distressed and pained by one's witnessing such a situation. There is no reference to any kind of imaginative exercise, and the idea of responding from some third person perspective does not capture what is distinctive about such responses. His comment is an invitation to his audience, ordinary people mostly not intellectuals, to reflect on how they themselves would respond when witnessing such a situation. And we ourselves can resonate with his description of the response – consider the way we would immediately react upon suddenly seeing a young child about to run into the path of an oncoming car. To ascribe these conceptions of sympathy or empathy to the perspective of ordinary people would be a conflation of purposes.

Space limitation prevents discussing the philological issues raised by David Wong's references to the Confucian idea of *shu* and to Dai Zhen. Michael Slote describes empathy as a kind of imaginative exercise, "a capacity for imagining what is not actual". How this notion bears on the paper depends on what kind of imaginative exercise is involved and what role it is supposed to play. Slote's comments suggest four possibilities.

First, he says of Mencius' example that the responder is "vividly aware of what the child is very likely *about to go through*" (his emphasis), which is "the empathic dimension" of the response. This might mean that the responder is aware that, without intervention, the child will fall and suffer severe injuries, maybe death. This diluted notion of empathy, apparently also at work in his example of the college student, basically amounts to awareness of possible outcomes that might not become actual, and it applies to practically all our daily activities. I stop at the stop sign being aware that not stopping might endanger myself and others, and a student works hard on a paper being aware that he would miss the deadline otherwise. Empathy in this diluted sense is not the concern of the paper and not the way the term is ordinarily used.

Second, by "what the child is very likely about to go through", Slote might mean what the child is likely to experience, *from the child's own perspective* – not just that the fall will lead to severe injury or death, but that the child will, say, feel a crushing pain and be traumatized into unconsciousness. Some of his remarks point in this direction, as in his comments on the Clinton example, or when he says that "when we fully empathize with another, we take in their feeling together with … its intentional object". But this is exactly what my paper states, on philological grounds, is *not* part of the response that Mencius describes. Although Slote mentioned in an earlier work that Mencius had anticipated some such notion of empathy, he now acknowledges that this is not mentioned by Mencius. Still, he adds that "such awareness seems integral to the situation Mencius describes even though Mencius himself never mentions it". What Mencius describes is the way he believes ordinary people would respond, and this description conforms with our own contemporary understanding. When we see the child running into the path of an oncoming car, we are shocked and alarmed and cannot bear to see what might happen to the child without intervention, exactly as Mencius describes. It seems artificial to insist that we must at the same time be "taking in" the crushing pain and trauma of the child if hit by the car.

Third, Slote's other comments suggest a different proposal. After acknowledging that Mencius "doesn't apply the idea of empathy within his account", he adds that "the alarm he does mention may actually depend on empathic mechanisms". According to him, "bringing in empathy gives us a mechanism for the alarm or distress … and … takes us beyond Mencius' attribution of a negative reaction … by telling us something about *how* such reactions arise" (his emphasis). He also makes repeated reference to the explanatory role of empathy – e.g., a "capacity for emotional empathy with others" explains the difference between the psychopath and those who do so react, and "we need empathy to explain what otherwise has to be posited as unexplained primordial moral/psychological differences". Independently of whether empathy does give an explanation of the response, Slote's observation basically agrees with the point of the paper that the kind of imaginative exercise he links to empathy is not part of the response; instead, it has to do with some underlying explanatory mechanism. There can, of course, be all kinds of

explanations, such as in terms of brain functions or an evolutionary account, but these intellectual accounts are not part of the perspective of ordinary people when they so respond.

Fourth, Slote's views basically come down to a criticism of Confucian thought for not adequately addressing the kind of intellectual questions that he himself is interested in. He describes Mencius' account as "primordial" and as "(failing) to do justice to these points (about explanatory mechanism)". He presents the Confucian approach *as if it were geared toward some kind of explanation*. According to him, it is intended as "theoretically simpler and more unified overall than any theory that applies empathy" but it has failed to do so as "the appeal to empathy is the most plausible theoretical approach we have (with) its systematic unifying forces". According to him, the Confucian approach seeks to be "corrective" but is not "correct", and its "criticisms of the empathy/sympathy approach … fall far short of the mark". And he talks in general about how "the West really has gone beyond traditional Chinese thinking" and that the Confucian approach "won't constitute a *course correction* for Western philosophy" (his emphasis).

I cannot agree with any of these comments because I cannot agree with the approach to Chinese thought they reflect. What he describes are not the kind of tasks that any Confucian thinker nor myself would even contemplate undertaking. Many philosophers and psychologists have written about empathy, using the word in different ways and for different purposes, and there is no single position unambiguously associated with the word that can be the target of criticism. Even if there were one, neither Confucian thinkers nor myself would be concerned with "criticism" of some such account, nor attempt to be "corrective", nor seek a "course correction", nor seek to provide a "systematic", "unifying" and more "plausible theoretical approach". In criticizing the Confucian approach as falling "far short of the mark" and in commenting on how "the West really has gone beyond traditional Chinese thinking", Slote is assessing Confucian thought in terms of the kind of explanatory task that he himself is concerned with, *as if Confucian thinkers were themselves also tackling this task*.

But any serious intellectual comment on the nature of Chinese thought and its bearing on contemporary Western philosophy has to be based on a robust understanding of Chinese thought, taking into account the history and culture, the language and texts. For this purpose, there is no substitute for either oneself conducting the needed historical and philological studies, which takes decades, or seriously consulting the work of historians and philologists who have undertaken this task. For anyone who has done this, it will be quite impossible to see Confucian thinkers as addressing the kind of intellectual questions that Slote describes. Instead, they would agree on the primarily practical orientation of Confucian thought and its emphasis on the perspective of ordinary people on familiar ethical experiences. They would not view Confucian ideas through the lens of certain contemporary Western philosophical agendas that Confucians do not share, and as a result describe Confucian ideas as "primordial", as falling "far short", or as inferior to the West in some other way. Instead, they would have serious respect for the Confucian thinkers' passionate dedication to ethical living, and would regard their ideas as providing profound insights into the human condition and how humans can live better. These are insights of direct practical relevance to ordinary people who live in different times and cultures,

and the overwhelming majority of whom are not intellectuals and do not share these contemporary Western intellectual agendas.

6. Concluding Remarks

The paper highlights a practitioner-based mode of reflection that is geared primarily toward a reflective understanding of ethical experiences familiar to ordinary people as seen from their own perspective. While there are strands in contemporary philosophical reflections that are in line with this approach, there are others that are geared primarily to addressing intellectual agendas other than this kind of reflective understanding. The latter represent what I have called a commentator-based mode of reflection. Highlighting the two distinct modes of ethical reflection serves a number of purposes.

First, it helps draw attention to the not uncommon tendency to conflate purposes, hopefully thereby mitigating such tendency. Before invoking some commentator-based conceptual frameworks in comments that concern the perspective of practitioners, we need to independently establish that such frameworks are suited for this purpose.

Second, it draws our attention to the complementary nature of the two modes of reflection. Both are legitimate relative to their purposes and both further our understanding of our ethical lives in different ways. Instead of the kind of blanket criticisms sometimes voiced by internal critics, any concern should be directed to the conflating move rather than to the other mode of reflection as such.

Third, regarding the study of Chinese thought in relation to contemporary Western philosophy, it explains why it is problematic to frame our understanding of the former in terms of the established agendas and conceptual frameworks of the latter. These are often commentator-based agendas and frameworks not suited to the practitioner-based approach that characterize the main Chinese traditions. For the same reason, it is fundamentally misguided to view Chinese thought through the lens of these agendas and thereby judge it inferior to the West. These moves are comparable in nature to the conflating move. Just as the latter involves an intellectual commentator ascribing his own habitual intellectual agendas and conceptions to ordinary people who are mostly not intellectuals, the former involves his ascribing them to other traditions that do not share such agendas and conceptions.

Fourth, it indicates a direction for addressing the question about the place of Chinese thought in philosophy as a contemporary intellectual discipline. Answering this question is not a matter of whether Chinese ideas can be made sense of in terms of established contemporary philosophical agendas and conceptual frameworks, but a matter of whether there are reasons to further highlight the practitioner-based mode of reflection within contemporary philosophical discourse.

I myself believe it important to take this direction. While the *content* of commentator-based accounts of ethics might be broadly applicable to humans, the *interest* in such accounts is limited

largely to members of the relevant intellectual community. By contrast, the outcomes of the practitioner-based mode of inquiry are of general interest and relevance to humans across cultures and times, as they relate directly to the familiar day-to-day experiences and immediate practical concerns of ordinary people, the overwhelming majority of whom are not intellectuals. If we take this direction, the inclusion of Chinese thought will be important because of their insights derived from their extensive work in this direction.