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RECOGNITION AND RESENTMENT IN THE CONFUCIAN *ANALECTS*

Abstract

Early Confucian "moral psychology" developed in the context of undoing reactive emotions in order to promote relationships of reciprocal recognition. Early Confucian texts diagnose the pervasiveness of reactive emotions under specific social conditions and respond with the ethical-psychological mandate to counter them in self-cultivation. Undoing negative affects is a basic element of becoming ethically noble, while the ignoble person is fixated on limited self-interested concerns and feelings of being unrecognized. Western ethical theory typically accepts equality and symmetry as conditions of disentangling resentment; yet this task requires the asymmetrical recognition of others. Confucian ethics integrates a nuanced and realistic moral psychology with the normatively oriented project of self-cultivation necessary for dismantling complex negative emotions in promoting a condition of humane benevolence that is oriented toward others and achieved through self-cultivation.

I. Introduction[1]

This article represents an attempt to interpret the role of negative emotions in early *ru* 儒 (Confucian) ethics through the example of the complex feeling of resentment as it is articulated in the *Analects* (*Lunyu*《論語》), attributed to Confucius (Kongzi 孔子), and associated classical Chinese sources. It is argued that the early Confucian model of ethical cultivation (*xiu* 脩 or *xiushen* 修身) is unfolded in the context of (i) unraveling reactive and negative feelings against others as they operate in oneself and in others and (ii) promoting concrete relationships of reciprocal and mutual yet graded and asymmetrical recognition between oneself and others. Early Confucian ethics can be portrayed for these reasons as a form of the ethics of asymmetry and alterity, albeit with striking differences from Western understandings of difference.

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In contrast to Western discourses of recognition and resentment, both the pervasiveness of negative affects such as resentment under certain social-political conditions as well as the ethical demand to counteract and transform reactive feelings within the self as well as in others is emphasized. Examples of negative emotions include various forms of envy, hatred, jealousy, vengefulness, and in particular resentment. Negative feelings about being inadequately recognized and acknowledged often appear justifiable, on generalized grounds of fairness, but are in fact psychologically and socially corrosive. Disentangling reactive feelings like resentment in oneself and in others is accordingly identified in a number of key passages in the *Analects* as a primary element of becoming a genuinely noble person (*junzi* 君子) in the ethical sense. To comport oneself with humility without obsequiousness and generosity without grandiosity toward others is to seek to be worthy of ethical recognition even when recognition, acknowledgment, and commendation are not and might never be forthcoming. The petty or ignoble person (*xiaoren* 小人) in contrast is depicted as fixated on his or her own limited and self-interested concerns to the detriment of others' well-being and as governed by reactive feelings against others such as the resentment of feeling unrecognized and slighted.

Standard forms of modern Western ethical theory typically presuppose that equal and symmetrical relations are the foremost means of unraveling reactive emotions, insofar as they include reflection on the moral psychology of negative emotions at all. In addition to examining various forms of resentment, vengefulness, ill-will, hatred, envy, contempt, bitterness, and anger at work within oneself, Confucian ethics requires one to consider the negative emotions that one's own behavior can cause in others. I argue that this thesis is due to the asymmetrical acknowledgment of the other person as non-identical with oneself. The recognition of the other is in this case not of an absolute individual or essential self who stands independently outside of and above its relations. Recognition is constitutively relational and social yet not necessarily symmetrical. Such recognition of the other is a necessary condition for disentangling the emotional nexus of resentment that is realized through social appropriateness and self-investigation and cultivation.

The other person has virtues, qualities, positions, possessions, abilities that I might never have and will not have to the same degree. The contextual relationality operative between self and other does not signify the identity between self and other. The asymmetrical reciprocity thesis defended here entails that one ethically recognizes and is responsive to others regardless of how one is recognized or unrecognized by others. This asymmetrical demand that one places on

oneself with respect to others extends from close familial to more general social relationships.[2]

Early Confucian ethics as a result integrates a nuanced and realistic moral psychology of negative socially shaped emotions such as resentment and antagonism with a normatively orienting model of self-cultivation that is indispensable for countering negative emotions and practicing humane benevolence (*ren* 仁) toward others. Instead of articulating an altruistic or egoistic vision of the ethical, the meditation of the priority of others and self-interest in ethically cultivating oneself is stressed. The ethically and ritually cultivated condition of the *junzi* suggested in the *Analects* is oriented toward others to the point of asymmetrically prioritizing the other, and the other's well-being, over oneself while at the same time being practicable in the resolute examination of and care for the self.

II. Resentment and the Struggle for Recognition

A basic concern of ordinary ethical life is being sufficiently or appropriately recognized and appreciated by others. One basic feature of ethical life thus appears to be—to use George W. F. Hegel's expression—the "struggle for recognition" and the potential resentment generated by the perceived lack of recognition and how to cope with it. The disappointment and frustration of not being recognized and acknowledged by others strikes many as a natural response. Even as such feelings are to be expected, and can be appropriate in the face of social injustices, emotional reactiveness and negativity represents an ethical, psychological, and social problem.

In this context, one can pose questions such as "Do such feelings naturally lead to justifiable negative reactions, and their associated reactive emotions, which are to be accepted as part of social life?" or "Do negative affects become debilitating to one's own moral life as well as to the well-being of others?" Such questions are a pressing issue today, as individuals who feel unrecognized, unappreciated, and unfairly slighted take their revenge on the communities they feel have slighted them through violence or through the more subtle means that concerned Friedrich Nietzsche in his analysis of *ressentiment* in his *Genealogy of Morals*.[3]

Issues of recognition and resentment have been central in modern and contemporary European philosophy and social theory. I would like to take up the question of the dialectic of recognition and misrecognition in order to examine (i) if and to what extent recognition and resentment play a significant role in classical Confucian philosophy, and (ii) whether a reconstruction of early Confucian

ethics with respect to this dialectic of recognition and misrecognition can offer an alternative critical model of conceptualizing this grammar of social and psychological conflict and diagnosing the present.

III. The Dialectic of Recognition and Resentment in the *Analects*

At first glance, thinking about recognition and resentment in the context of early Confucian sources might appear as an alien imposition. However, bringing an alternative question to bear on a text can bring about new insights and more than a few noteworthy passages in the *Analects* point to the necessity of countering various reactive feelings in the context of not being adequately recognized and acknowledged by others.

From the beginning of the text in *Analects* 1: 1, being ethically noble is explicitly linked with not being *yun* 慍. *Yun* has been translated in various English editions of the *Analects* as indignation, feeling hurt or bothered, and as being resentful. The negative feeling of *yun* is (i) socially mediated and (2) reactive toward others, because it is linked to others "not knowing" or—in the interpretation developed in this article—"not recognizing" (*buzhi* 不知) one:

> *Xue er shi xi zhi, bu yi shuo hu. you peng zi yuan fang lai, bu yi le hu. ren buzhi er bu yun, bu yi junzi hu.*
>
> 學而時習之、不亦説乎。 有朋自遠方來、不亦樂乎。人不知而不慍、不亦君子乎 。
>
> To learn something and practice it; is this not a pleasure? To have friends come from afar; is this not a delight? Not to be resentful (*yun* 慍) at other's failure to recognize (*buzhi* 不知) one, is this not to be ethically noble (*junzi*)?[4]

The very first passage of the *Analects* highlights the happiness of the enactment of ethical learning and the coming of friends or those who most recognize one. It also warns of the danger of reactive emotions in response to others' lack or denial of recognition and appreciation.

The conception that ethical nobility calling for a particular kind of response to the absence or privation of something from others, which is meaningful for oneself, without reactively worrying about it is similarly evident in *Analects* 1: 16:

> *Bu huan ren zhi bu ji zhi, huan buzhi ren ye.*
>
> 不患人之不己知、患不知人也。
>
> I do not worry (*huan* 患) about not being recognized. I worry (*huan* 患) about not recognizing (*buzhi* 不知) others.[5]

Huan 患 is of course not typically translated as resentment. *Huan* signifies to suffer from (illness, misfortune, disease), to be troubled by, or—as possible in its first occurrence in this passage—a reactive emotion akin to resentment. Non-recognition is here the occasion for another type of reactive emotional condition: namely, worrying. *Huan* indicates an inappropriate reactive being worried in its first use and an appropriate ethically oriented being worried in its second use in 1: 16.

Further support for this interpretation is evident in another one of the canonical *Four Books* (*Si Shu* 《四書》). In *Mencius*, 4B: 28: 7, *huan* functions as a form of anxiousness that is contrasted with *you* 憂. *You* has an overlapping but divergent range of meanings: anxiety, concern, worry, being bereft, and sorrow. Mengzi 孟子 differentiated having inappropriate anxieties about not being recognized, thereby becoming psychologically and ethically perturbed, and the ethically noble person's moral concern for cultivating benevolence and propriety, which constitutes a task of a lifetime.[6] Benevolence (*ren*) is a task; that is, as Master Zeng 曾子 specified in the *Analects*, the ethical vocation is a heavy burden that ends only with death.[7] The pursuit of becoming ethically noble in relation to others is a challenging responsibility that is to be pursued without anxieties or reactive negative emotions.

Providing evidence once again for the significance of undoing negative affects in the *Analects*, the ethically exemplary figure of Confucius is portrayed as warning against resenting either heaven or other persons in *Analects* 14: 35: "I do not resent (*yuan* 怨) heaven and do not fault (*you* 尤) others" (*Bu yuan tian, bu you ren* 不怨天，不尤人).

What then is the trouble with reactive emotions? Might they not be salutary as in the examples of just indignation and divine wrath of the Biblical tradition? A sense of justice and ethical judgment is part of Confucian ethical psychology. But reactive feelings against heaven and others are anxiety provoking afflictions formed and mediated in social processes of misrecognition or the perceived lack of recognition by others. If we can compare it to the recent debate over the ethics of recognition, early Confucian ethics approximates more closely an ethics of recognition than an ethics of distribution, because distributive justice (that is, of who appropriately receives what) follows the dialectic of interpersonal recognition.[8]

Early Confucian sources indicate an asymmetrical relational strategy for dismantling the complex emotional compounds of resentment by minimizing what one expects from others while at the same time intensifying what one expects from oneself. In this sense, I am more responsible than the other. Rather than focusing on what others ostensibly owe me, and the slights I might have received from this

recognition and regard not being given to me, I am asked to turn my attention to whether and how I am recognizing and regarding others.

IV. Resentment and Asymmetrical Ethics

This point of asymmetrically prioritizing the other over the self, even when there is no expectation of reciprocation involved, is evident in the attitude one should take toward one's parents. For instance, it is stated in *Analects* 4: 18 concerning asymmetrical filial respect toward one's parents:

> *Shi fumu ji jian. jian zhi bu cong, you jing bu wei, lao er bu yuan.*
>
> 事父母几諫。見志不從、又敬不違、勞而不怨。
>
> In serving your mother and father, one remonstrates gently. If one sees that they are not going to listen, one continues to be respectful and does not distance oneself from them. Even if it is burdensome, one does not feel resentful (*yuan* 怨).

The asymmetrical priority of the other over the self is most palpable in familial relations in Confucianism. It could be objected that this priority is merely hierarchical or that it is self-interested in the long run: one might eventually be a parent oneself and in turn reap the benefits of such a familial system. Nonetheless, family relations are the matrix in which all ethical relations are nourished and developed, and the asymmetrical concern for others extends beyond one's parents and family in passages such as *Analects* 1: 16 and 12: 2.[9]

One justification for this asymmetry between self and other is the distinction made in *Analects* 4: 16 between that which is "righteous" or ethically appropriate and fitting (*yi* 義) and that which concerns personal advantage and profit (*li* 利). The distinction between the fitting and the profitable forms the basis of the difference between the exemplary ethically noble person and the petty unethical person. While ethical righteousness impartially respects all while responding to the partial situated particularity of each person, the partial calculative advantage of the ignoble person disregards what is impartially appropriate for others in his or her self-interested concern.[10]

Furthermore, there is a distinction to be made between the degree of asymmetrical regard for others shown by the benevolent person and by the sage (*sheng* 聖). In *Analects* 6: 30, in response to Zigong's question concerning perfect benevolence, the benevolent person is described as establishing and promoting the self through establishing and promoting others. Similarly, the ethically noble person is described as cultivating the self through respect and reverence for others in *Analects* 14: 42 (*xiu ji yi jing* 脩己以敬). But, in the ensuing

conversation about the sage, even the great Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 are said to find it challenging to cultivate themselves by realizing tranquility for all. This claim indicates that there is a higher ethical condition in which the sage acts for others beyond benevolence. This sage is portrayed in the *Analects* as acting solely out of generosity and kindness toward all without consideration of establishing the self or symmetrically receiving something in return.[11]

Confucian asymmetry is therefore not typically a pure self-sacrifice or self-negation; nor is it the asymmetry of the self and the absolute other or God familiar in Western religiously informed ethics. Asymmetry is conceived in early Confucian sources as the extension and broadening of the self in the context of its ethical self-concern and self-cultivation. The give-and-take, the rituals and spontaneous moments, of everyday ethical life is not motivated by pure selflessness and pure otherness. The vitality and motivation of moral life arises from the self being concerned for itself and its ethical character in its relations with and concern for others. It is not by negating ordinary desires and feelings that the ethical is to be realized. It is in effect ordinary non-heroic and mundane motives that shape and encourage becoming a self that is interpreted as a situated responsive participant in the everyday life of the family and community.

Early Confucian thinkers emphasize transforming reactive affects within the participant perspective of ordinary ethical life without appealing to notions of a third-person neutrality, a God's eye transcendent perspective, or a purportedly contextless and objective point of view from nowhere. Owen Flanagan has argued in his essay "Destructive Emotions" how self-transformation through structuring one's cognitions and affects, including transfiguring the emotions, is not only a basic characteristic of Eastern approaches to ethical life but of most varieties of moral wisdom.[12] Working through and eliminating negative emotions in cognitive-affective restructuring is not an alienation from unchangeable "natural" states. Receptively working with one's emotions belongs to the dynamic of moral wisdom itself.

A further example is a third word associated with sentiments of resentment found in passages from the *Analects* concerning one's attitude toward one's parents as well as portrayals of the virtuous brothers Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齐.[13] It is claimed in *Analects* 7: 15 that these two brothers did not feel resentment (*yuan* 怨), because they "sought and obtained humaneness, what would they resent?" In *Analects* 5: 23, it is said that they "did not recall old grievances, and so there was little resentment (*yuan* 怨) against them." *Yuan* in these contexts signified to blame, complain, and resent or to more inwardly feel aggrieved.[14]

Confucius is portrayed in these sources as associating the absence of the feeling of resentment and complaint against others with the achievement of benevolence or humaneness (*ren*). This general concern is construed ethically in the distinction between gratitude and resentment in the *daoshu* 道術 chapter of the "New Writings" (*Xinshu*〈新書〉), a political treatise by the early Han Dynasty scholar Jia Yi 賈誼 (200–168 BCE) advocating the regulation of classes in society through the principle of benevolence: "If there is an immanent order to practicing virtue it is deserving gratitude; to reverse deserving gratitude is to cause resentment (*yuan* 怨)."[15]

Confucius depicts how lower forms of conduct that cause resentment in others can be avoided by expecting much of oneself and little of others (*yi yi hu wu wei jian hao de ru haose zhe ye* 已矣乎吾未見好德如好色者也).[16] Passages such as *Analects* 5: 23 illustrate how action for the other is a basic strategy of reducing resentfulness against others and within oneself. Likewise, the discussion in *Analects* 20: 2 indicates the importance of not making others feel resentful through one's own behavior. An additional fourth less frequently used term in the literature is *fen* 憤. It is likewise used in sources to emphasize not angering others and, in particular, not becoming the cause of resentment and enmity in others.

Based on these and related expressions, we can conclude that even if others act in a way that would produce negative emotions like resentment in yourself, becoming ethically realized as a *junzi* entails not having reactive feelings by working on and adjusting your emotions and by acting non-symmetrically and non-interchangeably with humane benevolence toward them. This benevolence encompasses moral criticism and judgment from a Confucian perspective; and the benevolence one respectively owes toward the harmful and the virtuous is differentiated in *Analects* 14: 34. Nonetheless, the noble person should not become emotionally petty or ignoble toward others regardless of how others treat her or him or their moral character.

V. Resentment and the Ethics of Alterity

The strategy of an other-oriented self-interestedness, in which self and other are conceived as relationally conjoined and complementary rather than as irreconcilable contraries or as isolated individuals, introduces an alternative model to how resentment is typically conceptualized in Western ethics in terms of an either-or between the selfishness of egoism and selflessness of altruism.

According to the interpretative reconstruction offered in this article, early Confucian ethics suggests that reducing resentment in

others also reduces its being turned by others against oneself. In the image of selling resentment as buying disaster, the ethical is conjoined with and not divorced from pragmatic considerations as is emblematic of postmodern Western accounts of ethical asymmetry and alterity. Instead of selling resentment, Confucius is interpreted in the Chinese tradition based on one passage in the *Analects* as advocating repaying resentment with uprightness instead of virtue, because only the virtuous are to be repaid with virtue. However, another interpretive tradition attributes the idea of repaying resentment with virtue to Confucius and thereby potentially transforming calamity into good fortune.[17] The reason for this is that, as Zhengtian Xi 郑天锡 argued, "retaliation or revenge lowers oneself to the level of the wrongdoer, and resentment shows a lack of magnanimity."[18]

The ethical point of view cannot be divorced from the pragmatic conditions in which it is cultivated and realized. The social interactive process of undermining the causes of resentment in others and oneself is pragmatically associated with good fortune. Still, it accomplishes more than pragmatically decreasing the potential resentment of others against oneself. It would, in addition, undo the feverish state of one's reactive emotions and their moral-psychological fixations in one's heart-mind (*xin* 心). Undoing resentment is consequently a shared social mission instead of the romantic task of the heroic, isolated, noble individual who always sacrifices herself or himself for others.

The early *ru* authors of the *Analects* interpreted the distinction between the noble person (*junzi*) and the petty person (*xiaoren*), the "small person" who is unable to exhibit "smallness" or humbleness of the heart-mind, in light of the negative affects. The petty or ignoble person is portrayed as resenting being kept at a distance and acting out of a limited moral psychological condition; that is, out of small-minded self-interest and mean-spirited feelings of resentment toward others in an anxious and insecure self-centered and partisan search for profits, favors, comforts, and accolades. As the *Great Learning* (*Daxue*《大學》) confirms, in contrasting the path of resentment with the path of kindness and tolerance, animosity and resentment undermine the capacity to achieve a straightness of mind and wholeness of character.[19]

Negative emotions in the *Analects* are, as seen in the previous discussion above, understood through a variety of psychologically related yet distinct terms: *yun* (to be indignant, to feel hurt or discontented by), *yuan* (to blame, to complain of), *fen* 憤 (to be indignant or angered), and *huan* and *you* (to suffer, be worried or troubled by). The authors of the *Analects* can consequently be said to be aware of the ubiquity of resentment under certain conditions and the ethical

requirement to challenge it and related reactive feelings both within oneself (e.g., not being resentful) and in relation to others (e.g., not engendering resentment in others in personal life and in government). Early Confucian ethical thought identifies this moral-psychological work on the emotions as being a key element of the ethically noble character of the *junzi*. This is emphasized in the understanding of resentment and related reactive affects revealed in early Confucian sources. Obviously, negative affects might play a positive role and be worthy of praise such as indignation against injustice and viciousness; yet they primarily damage others and the persons whose comportment and attitudes are shaped by them.

Untangling resentment in oneself as well as in others is a primary element of becoming a gentleman, who as Confucius and Mencius both note does not resent heaven or humans, and genuinely noble in the ethical sense. This nobility is achieved through self-cultivation and is contrasted with the ethically flawed comportment of the petty person who is fixated on his or her own limited concerns and selfish interests. It accordingly should be part of a well-rounded account of resisting and unfixing reactive emotions against others. The recognition of the other in her or his asymmetry is necessary for unraveling the nexus of resentment. This asymmetrical recognition is visible in *Analects* 1: 1 and 1: 16. To this extent, early Confucian literati have a nuanced and realistic moral psychology of resentment as well as the ethical self-cultivation and self-rectification requisite for dismantling resentment in achieving a condition of gradated benevolent humaneness (*ren*).

The early Confucian model of self-affirmation through cognitive-affective self-rectification suggests an alternative to Western ethical theory torn between egoism and altruism. Self-affirmation does not demand the negation of the other. It leads to a cultivation of the self that involves confronting one's own resentment. A resentful state of mind is tied up with a narrow self-concern and egoism that expresses a limited or small conception of the self as well as an exaggerated sense of one's merits, such that one can act for others without necessitating the same in the calculative expectation and instrumental logic of exchange.

The Confucian ethical point of view relies on the reciprocity (*shu* 恕) of seeing the other as being analogous to oneself. This analogousness is not, however, the equal symmetry between independent individual agents that is always in the end a conditional self-interested exchange. An ethical claim is perceived as being asymmetrically made upon oneself independent of one's own claim upon the other and thus does not entail the symmetry that reduces the other to oneself and occasions the resentment of not being treated equally by the other.

Analogy is in this setting not identity, given the importance of making distinctions in moral judgment and the asymmetries operative in interpersonal human relations.

The asymmetrical and proportional character of the ethical signifies the impossibility of expecting of others the same as what one expects of oneself and to experience this ethical demand without resentment. That one expects more of oneself than of others such that the other's lack of recognition and appreciation is not perceived to be a justification of one's own lack. Indeed, more than this, it brings forth the asymmetrical demand that one recognize the other regardless of whether the other recognizes oneself. Even if the logic of reciprocal and equal exchange naturally flows into resentment against others, the asymmetry in the early Confucian articulation of reciprocity and mutuality (*shu*)—a notion in which sympathy and kindness toward the other come to be accentuated rather than a pragmatic instrumental exchange—turns questions of resentment and responsibility back upon oneself:

> *Bu huan wu wei, huan suoyi li; bu huan mo ji zhi, qiu wei kezhi ye.*
>
> 不患無位、患所以立; 不患莫己知、求為可知也。
>
> I do not worry (*huan* 患) about not holding a good position; I worry about how I make myself fit to gain a position. I do not worry about being unrecognized; I seek to be fit to be recognized.[20]

According to the interpretation developed in this article, the "anxiety" and "worry" expressed in *Analects* 4: 14 encompasses feelings of resentment. It can be understood to entail the need not to feel resentment at not holding a good position and being recognized, a common concern in ordinary ethical life, but focusing instead on becoming ethically worthy of others' recognition: that is to say, "I do not resent being unrecognized; I seek to be worthy of recognition."

VI. Unfixing Resentment

Unfixing reactive emotions is not only a psychological endeavor; it represents a social-political task in the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. Early Confucian ethics, most notably in the work attributed to Mencius, reveals a social-critical dimension. The exemplary orienting model of self-cultivation suggested in the *Analects* encompasses undoing reactive feelings in the self even as it calls for asymmetrically recognizing the difficulty of not having such reactive feelings under challenging life-conditions. One example of the early Confucian attention to the social conditions of negative emotions is the remark: "To be poor without resentment (*yuan* 怨) is difficult. To be rich

without arrogance is easy."[21] Both the impoverished and the wealthy require the moral psychological work of self-cultivation. Nonetheless, despite the easiness and difficulty involved, the wealthy are more likely to be arrogant than the poor resentful in the Confucian understanding.[22] The powerful fail to recognize and show reverence for the weak and destitute, which reveals a pettiness and lack of appropriate ethical self-cultivation.

Revealing its critical potential, early Confucian sources note that the "petty person" (*xiaoren*) can be a person of power and wealth who fails to act with the appropriate measure that such power or wealth bring, such as the inauthentic kings and nobles criticized in the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. While the ignoble person is ethically problematic in shifting fault and blame on others, and evading recognizing others and self-reflection, the ethically noble person (*junzi*) self-reflectively turns blame into an opportunity for self-examination. This self-critical spirit is expressed in *Analects* 4: 17:

> *Jian xian si qi yan; jian bu xian er nei zi xing ye.*
> 見賢思齊焉; 見不賢而內自省也。
>
> When you encounter good persons, think of becoming their equal.
> When you encounter inferior persons, examine yourself.

"Pettiness" reveals itself to be a moral rather than a class designation in the *Analects* to the degree that it signifies the person who should know and do better and yet does not. In a claim further developed in the *Mencius*, the asymmetry of benevolence entails that the ordinary person's resentment should not be judged and criticized in the same way as the person who acts out of resentment and pettiness despite enjoying more of the advantages of life. In contrast to the prevailing Western discourses of recognition and resentment, early Confucian ethics is asymmetrically concerned with those whose reactive and limited emotional lives negatively impact others: hence, there is a greater concern with the resentment of the rich and the powerful rather than the poor and the weak who deserve benevolence and equity rather than the blame, condemnation, and suffering too often inflicted upon them.

The theme of resentment is articulated in other early Chinese non-Confucian sources. Mozi 墨子, for instance, warned how lack of order, obedience, and mutual love allowed resentment and hatred to flourish.[23] Like Xunzi 荀子 after him, Mo Di 墨翟 contrasted "public righteousness" (*gong* 公) with private or selfish resentment (*siyuan* 私怨).[24] Even while early Confucian thinkers shared this terminology, they rejected Moist (*mojia* 墨家) doctrines of an impartial universal love (*jianai* 兼愛) as an inappropriate attitude for caring for the concrete specific other and oneself. The universal ethical point of view

or an altruistic moral perspective is an impossible ideal that is detrimental to ethical life that begins with family, friends, and neighbors rather than universally equal persons. We see in the *Mencius* examples of how it is a moral ideal that cannot be performatively put into practice without falling into either contradictions or moralistic fanaticism. Early Confucian ethics offers a robust rationale for the cultivation of an asymmetrical and graded humaneness; for example, of bringing comfort to the elderly, confidence to friends, and nurturance to the young in *Analects* 5: 26. This situated appropriateness contrasts with an undifferentiating objective stance or equalizing global feeling of love or sympathy. Impartiality does not entail neutrality; on the contrary, impartiality in the Confucian context requires being partial for those for whom one has greater responsibility and responsively addressing one's moral concern to the specificity of who they are. The ethically noble person is thus described in *Analects* 4: 10 as acting without prejudice. In *Analects* 2: 14, the ethical person is described as "all-embracing and not partial. The inferior person is partial and not all-embracing" (*junzi zhou er bubi, xiao ren bi er bu zhou* 君子周而不比、小人比而不周).

Ethical agency presupposes affectively grounded yet reflective processes of discernment and judgment. The ethical agent cultivates her or his abilities to make distinctions about merit, character, and the significance of relative bonds of friendship, filiality, family, and familiarity. Confucian texts such as the *Classic of Familial Reverence* (*Xiaojing* 《孝經》) stress the asymmetrical responsibilities of parents to children, the old to the young, the powerful to the weak, and the wealthy to the poor. In its opening chapter, familial reverence is described as the root of education and remembrance of others as orientating self-cultivation.[25] Familial reverence, the medium of moral life and its cultivation, accordingly does not aim at mere control and subordination. Its purpose is to prepare children to become autonomous and socially responsible moral agents who have a sense of their own individual moral life.[26]

A different model can be reconstructed from the early Confucian discourse of the negative emotions. This involves cultivating the self in the context of the real psychological motives of action such that the lack of magnanimity associated with resentment is not overcome in being negated and transcended in realizing a superior state of being. It is recognized and confronted within the very workings of the self. In early Confucian philosophy, ethical reflection and judgment have need of a realistic and still ethically oriented sense of human psychology and anthropology in order for the ethical to be enacted and practiced. Observing, listening, and learning from others becomes central to ethically interacting with others and cultivating one's own

disposition. The late Eastern Han Dynasty philosopher Xu Gan 徐幹 articulated his *Discourse on the Mean* (*Zhonglun*《中論》) how sociability—listening to others and attuning one's feelings in relation to others—furthers and constitutes wisdom.[27]

It is better to cause resentment in others than to do wrong, such as—in an example in the *biaoji* 表記 chapter of the *Book of Rites* (*Liji*《禮記》)—causing resentment by refusing to make a promise that one cannot be fulfilled. Wisdom includes not being an unnecessary cause of the other's resentment. This wisdom extends to the art of government that necessitates action while minimizing "animosity and resentment."[28] It encompasses even the king's ability to govern. Early Confucian thinkers such as Mencius and Xunzi portray how the king's rule is destabilized by permitting the resentments of the people and other kings to flourish. The festering of resentment eats away at and dissolves ethical life. The destruction of the ethical brings disaster upon families, communities, and society.

The Confucian focus on counteracting and lessening provoking reactive feelings in others in order to maintain the fabric of everyday life and stable government is employed in Confucian arguments for the necessity of ritual, music, and poetry for moral life. These practices are not secondary ornamental considerations; they instruct and orient agents, helping them to appropriately regulate their emotions. The rituals of everyday interactions and ritual appropriateness (*li* 禮) accomplish a regulation of the emotions and much more: it emancipates the self from its narrowness and places it into the fullness of life in all of its dimensions.

The repeatedly stated esteem of Confucius for the *Book of Odes* (*Shi Jing*《詩經》) is centered in an appeal to their function in promoting ethical self-cultivation and balancing nurture and nature. The classic songs of Zhou 周 ought not to simply function to conservatively reinforce the conformity of traditional tastes. Poetry and music join one with others and with the self, allowing for the creative appropriation of contextual relationships. The odes teach sociality and the art of sociability; they promote self-contemplation and reveal how to regulate feelings of resentment (*yuan*).[29]

Confucian ethics requires confronting self-deception and false consciousness with honesty and straightforwardness of mind. It calls for honesty with oneself and others; a recognition of one's own resentment rather than its concealment, and not feigning a moral condition one does not understand. The possibility of hidden resentment is articulated in *Analects* 5: 25:

> *Qiao yan, ling se, ju gong, zuo qiu ming chi zhi, qiu yi chi zhi. Ni yuan er you qi ren, zuo qiu ming chi zhi, qiu yi chi zhi.*

> 巧言、令色、足恭、左丘明恥之、丘亦恥之。匿怨而友其人、左丘明恥之、丘亦恥之。
>
> Clever words, a pretentious appearance, and excessive courtesy: Zuo Qiuming found them shameful, and I also find them shameful. Concealing resentment (*yuan* 怨) and befriending the person resented (*yuan* 怨): Zuo Qiuming found them shameful, and I also find them shameful.[30]

The Ruist assessment of flattery and obsequiousness, evident in *Analects* 1: 15 and 2: 24, and promotion of a genuineness of feeling, straightforwardness of mind, and individual constancy in the face of social pressures point toward a resonance between the ethics of nobleness in the texts of early Confucian sources.

James S. Hans argued that Confucian ethics appreciates the reality and mechanisms of resentment in ordinary moral life. It does not employ guilt—or the resentment against resentment—in a futile and toxic attempt to cure it and better humanity through external discipline and internal self-negation.[31] It encompasses a variety of personal self-cultivation that embraces both the affective and cognitive dimensions of human life. It is exaggerated to claim that the practice of individuation occurs in an "aesthetic context without ground," because there is neither existential groundlessness nor metaphysical foundationalism in early Confucianism and self-cultivation is more than an aesthetic undertaking. Cultivation occurs in and responds to an interwoven web of aesthetic, ethical, and psychological conditions and claims.[32]

Early Confucian philosophy stressed the self-cultivation of genuineness and generosity out of self-affirmation and reject motivations formed by the negation of the other. Confucians demonstrate how social rituals and conventions are a principal vehicle of ethical individuation rather than being mere conformity or a prudential self-betrayal.

Hints of the early Confucian discourse of recognition and resentment are expressed in later Neo-Confucian sources that reconfirm the affinity and difference between the asymmetrical sociality of Confucian ethics and conventional hierarchical moralities. Wang Yangming 王陽明, for instance, elucidates the idea of reciprocal reproof without causing resentment in oneself or others in his "Encouraging Goodness through Reproof." The "way of friends" is the social realization of the good. It signifies both to accept reproof from others without feeling resentment toward them, because they are our best teachers, and to move others to improve themselves without fault-finding and without making them feel shame and resentment.[33] Mozi described the non-resentful state of mind of the ethically exemplary person (*junzi*) as a self-confidence that is maintained even when one is mistaken as being a common person.[34]

Resentment is overcome through recognition in early Confucian ethical reflection. To genuinely know the self would be to undermine negative affects against others and the course of "heaven" (*tian* 天, which should be understood as signifying something closer to "nature" than to a spiritual realm). Xunzi accordingly stated:

> *Zi zhi zhe bu yuan ren, zhiming zhe bu yuan tian; yuan ren zhe qiong, yuan tian zhe wu zhi. Shi zhi ji, fanzhi ren, qi bu yu hu zai!*
>
> 自知者不怨人，知命者不怨天；怨人者窮，怨天者無志。失之己，反之人，豈不迂乎哉！
>
> Those who recognize (*zhi*) themselves do not resent (*yuan*) others; those who recognize fate do not resent heaven. Those who resent others are bound to fail; those who resent heaven do not learn from experience.[35]

Early Confucian thinking overcomes resentment through the ethical perspective of acting for the sake of others while examining oneself in order to achieve self-recognition. There are appeals to not resent "heaven" or "nature" (*tian*) in early Confucian writings, as evident in Confucius and Xunzi, which can be interpreted as conditions of its recognition and appreciation.[36] In this context, recognizing oneself and others cannot be radically separated from recognizing heaven and nature, although the address to heaven or nature in Xunzi cannot be interpreted as an appeal to an otherworldly transcendence or eternity but rather relies on the immanent course and order of the world.

Confucian ethical thought accomplishes in an earthy, immanent, and more modest manner what Western thinkers require of the transcendent and eternal. Confucian ethics offers a philosophical framework for an immanent ethics of the other, for an altruism that is rooted in the moral feelings of the self, and in the reformation rather than the rejection of the natural and social-historical forces that condition and shape ethical reality.

VII. Critical Confucian Ethics and the Politics of Resentment

Historically, the *ru* tradition has been predominantly anti-egalitarian, hierarchical, and traditionalist. Nonetheless, there are also morally oriented reformist tendencies that prioritize the well-being of others and the people. Such tendencies are apparent in the *Analects* when it, for instance, prioritizes the ethical while still connecting it with pragmatic and instrumental interests.[37]

Such alternative critical tendencies are in particular voiced in the book associated with Mengzi. Asymmetrical ethics appears there in

the context of the self's natural responsiveness and cultivated responsibility toward others. In the *Mencius*, the cognitive-affective economy of humans is predisposed toward ethics. It is, to appropriate a phrase from Owen Flanagan, "naturally structured for morality."[38]

The genuine ethical person, and the genuine king whose legitimate power is based in the people and serves their well-being, not only acts for the sake of the people's well-being but hears, listens, and responds to their voices rather than resenting their desires, demands, and perceived imperfections.

In the initial passages of the *Mencius*, it is not the people but the flawed King Hui of Liang (Liang Hui Wang 梁惠王) who is filled with narrow desires, limited self-interest, and resentment against his people and neighboring kings. King Hui suffers from his incapacity to recognize that others are suffering and extend his heart-mind toward others. However, despite his excuses, this king is not naturally or constitutionally unable. As Mengzi reveals to the king's discomfort in their reported conversation, King Hui is affectively and reflectively unwilling to be responsive to and take responsibility for those affected by his misuse of his position, power, and wealth. A parallel point about the resentment of the powerful against the weak is made by Mozi, when he stated: "Great rivers do not resent the little streams that fill them because they are what can make them great."[39]

The line of argumentation analyzed in this article from the *Analects* and the *Mencius* continues to have a significant critical import for contemporary ethical and political reflection. Analyzing the dialectic of recognition and resentment exposes the ideological uses of the "politics of resentment." The early Confucians maintained that when either coercion and force or power and wealth are abused, the people will be naturally resentful. Confucian thinkers concluded that the resentment of non-elites against elites is ethically less blameworthy and politically less problematic than the arrogance, enmity, and resentment of elites against non-elites. Such resentment is evident in contemporary discourses concerning the distribution of wealth and power that tend to blame the poor, the weak, and the voiceless for their condition.

VIII. Conclusion

Daniel A. Bell notes how "the traditional Confucian ways may assert themselves against—or at least mitigate—negative emotions such as resentment and aggressive nationalism."[40] In this article, I would like to take this insight a step further. On the basis of the alternate "critical" and transformative tendencies articulated in the classical *ru*

tradition itself, particularly in the text associated with Mencius, a contemporary Confucian interpretation of asymmetrical responsibility can well be argued to provide a number of compelling reasons for promoting social-political equality, challenging claims of privilege that serve as an illegitimate justification or excuse for opposing greater fairness and equity among the people.

A contemporary reconstructed model of early Confucian ethics can accomplish such a critical and ethically transformative task by contesting and deconstructing instead of furthering conditions of misrecognition and the negative reactive emotions such as resentment that such conditions foster. This article is written in the hope of contributing to and furthering the project of a "Critical Confucian" ethical theory.

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Endnotes

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1. I have relied on and modified the following translations of the *Analects*: Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (New York: Random House, 1998), Raymond Dawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Charles Muller (http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/analects.html), and Edward Slingerland (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003). Chinese quotations are from the Chinese Text Project (http://ctext.org/).
2. *Analects*, 12: 2. I argue for the importance of alterity and asymmetry in early Confucian ethics in Eric S. Nelson, "Levinas and Early Confucian Ethics: Religion, Rituality, and the Sources of Morality," in Jeffrey Bloechl, ed., *Levinas Studies*, Vol. 4 (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2009), 177–207.
3. *Ressentiment* is, according to Nietzsche, the pathological form of resentment that governs conventional morality and religion. On the problem of resentment in Western and Confucian philosophy, see Eric S. Nelson, "The Question of Resentment in Nietzsche and Confucian Ethics," *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies* 10, no. 1 (2013): 17–51.
4. *Analects*, 1: 1.
5. Ibid., 1: 16.
6. *Mencius*, 4B: 28: 7. *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Bryan W. Van Norden (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008), 112.

7. *Analects*, 8: 7.
8. On the recent debate in critical social theory over the merits of a Marxian model of distribution or a Hegelian dialectic of recognition, see Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003).
9. Compare the discussion of this passage in James Behuniak, *Mencius on Becoming Human* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 65.
10. *Analects*, 2: 14, 4: 10.
11. Ibid., 6: 30.
12. Owen Flanagan, "Destructive Emotions," *Consciousness and Emotions* 1, no. 2 (2000): 277.
13. See, respectively, *Analects*, 4: 18 and 5: 23, 7: 15.
14. See Irene Bloom's discussion of the ambivalence of this term in *Mencius*, trans. Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 97.
15. *Shixing de li wei zhi de, fan de wei yuan* 施行得理謂之德, 反德為怨; Xingguo Wang, *Jia Yi ping zhuan* (Nanjing: Nanjing da xue chu ban she, 1992), 228.
16. *Analects*, 15: 15.
17. Compare Hongkyung Kim, *The Old Master: A Syncretic Reading of the* Laozi *from the Mawangdui Text A Onward* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 103.
18. F. T. Cheng, *China Molded by Confucius: The Chinese Way in Western Light* (London: Stevens, 1946), 81.
19. See particularly sections 7 and 10, *Ta Hsüeh and Chung Yung: The Highest Order of Cultivation and on the Practice of the Mean*, trans. Andrew Plaks (London: Penguin, 2003), 11, 17–18.
20. *Analects*, 4: 14.
21. Ibid., 14: 10.
22. Note the discussion of economic status and the ability to overcome resentment in achieving a good disposition in Erin M. Cline, *Confucius, Rawls, and the Sense of Justice* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 148.
23. See Mozi, *Exalting Unity II*, 12: 1 and *Universal Love II*, 15: 2. Mo Di, *The Mozi: A Complete Translation*, trans. Ian Johnston (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2010), 99, 139.
24. See Mozi, *Exalting Worthiness I*, 8: 5. Mo Di, *The Mozi*, 59. On the use of this distinction in Moism and Confucianism, see Chun-Chieh Huang, "East Asian Conceptions of the Public and Private. Realms," in Kam-por Yu, Julia Tao, and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Taking Confucian Ethics Seriously Contemporary Theories and Applications* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 78.
25. *Xiaojing*, Ch. 4; *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*, trans. Henry Rosemont, and Roger T. Ames (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 107.
26. Compare Paul R. Goldin, *Confucianism* (Durham: Acumen, 2011), 35.
27. Xu Gan, *Balanced Discourses: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. John Makeham (Beijing and New Haven: Foreign Language Press and Yale University Press, 2002), 7.
28. *Xiaojing*, Ch. 1; 105.
29. *Analects*, 17: 8.
30. Ibid., 5: 25.
31. James S. Hans, *Contextual Authority and Aesthetic Truth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 337.
32. Ibid.
33. Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Readings from the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), 176.
34. Mozi, *On Being Sympathetic towards Officers*, 1: 3. Mo Di, *The Mozi*, 5.
35. *Xunzi* 4.5; Xunzi, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol. 1, trans. John Knoblock (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 188.
36. On not resenting heaven as part of a Confucian ethical-epistemic project of recognizing and knowing, see Xinzhong Yao, *Wisdom in Early Confucian and Israelite Traditions* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 203.

37. *Analects*, 16: 2.
38. Flanagan, "Destructive Emotions," 269.
39. Mozi, *On Being Sympathetic towards Officers*, 1: 5. Mo Di, *The Mozi*, 7.
40. Daniel A. Bell, *China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 101.