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The Question of Resentment in Nietzsche and  
Confucian Ethics  
尼采與儒家倫理中「憤」的問題

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**關鍵詞：**情感、倫理、憤、修身、孔子、尼采

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## Abstract

I examine in this paper the experience of "resentment" in Chinese and European ethical thinking, particularly in early Confucian ethics and in Nietzsche's genealogy of *ressentiment*. Self-cultivation is articulated in the *Analects* in light of issues of recognition and resentment. In contrast to European discourses of recognition and resentment, the compilers of the *Analects* recognized the pervasiveness of resentment under certain social conditions and the ethical demand to counter it both within oneself and in relation to others. In early Confucian ethics, resentment is understood in a variety of senses. Overcoming resentment in oneself and in others is a primary element of becoming a genuinely exemplary or noble person in the ethical sense; the ignoble person by contrast is fixated on his or her own limited and self-interested concerns. Whereas contemporary Western ethical theory typically assumes that symmetry and equality are the primary means of overcoming resentment, I examine how the asymmetrical recognition of the priority of the other appears necessary for overcoming resentment in the *Analects*. Early Confucian ethics integrates a nuanced and realistic moral psychology of resentment and the ethical self-cultivation necessary for dismantling it in promoting a condition of humane benevolence. Benevolence is oriented toward others even as it is achieved in the care of the self and self-cultivation.

## 摘要

本文檢視中國與歐洲倫理思想對「憤」的體驗，尤其是早期儒家倫理中的「憤」與尼采對「憤」的系列討論。《論語》在闡釋認知與「憤」的議題時談到修身。相對於歐洲對認知與「憤」的討論，《論語》的編輯者已經意識到「憤」在特定社會條件下的普遍性，以及自我在內心之中及在與他者互動時與「憤」對抗的倫理需求。早期儒家倫理對「憤」有種種不同層面的理解。就倫理層面而言，克服在自我內心中以及對他者的「憤」是成為真正的模範或聖人的首要條件；相對而言，小人將自己侷限在利己的思維中。當代西方倫理理論通常假設克服「憤」的主要方法是對稱和平等。本文探討在《論語》中，以他者為優先的不對稱認知在克服「憤」時何以有其必要。為提升人性的仁，早期儒家倫理將具細微差別和現實的，「憤」的道德心理學，和將「憤」去除時所需要的，合乎道德的修身加以整合。仁的對象是他者，即便仁是因關心自我和修身而達到的。

## 1. Introduction: Three Western Interpretations of Resentment<sup>1</sup>

Moral phenomena such as resentment and shame have not been of primary concern in Western moral thinking, which tends to focus on issues of guilt and responsibility. Notable exceptions to this tendency are three modern thinkers who interrogated resentment as a key dimension of ethical life: Sir Peter Frederick Strawson (1919-2006), Max Ferdinand Scheler (1874-1928), and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900). Because of their concern with the negative reactive affects and social dynamics constitutive of resentment, they provide a useful introduction to discussions of resentment in Confucian ethics. I proceed in this paper from the temporally later Western thinkers to Confucian philosophers in order to illustrate how Confucian ethics offers a unique alternative understanding of resentment and its role in self-cultivation and the relationship between self and other.

In his classic essay "Freedom and Resentment," first published in 1962, P. F. Strawson maintained that resentment and other reactive affects are natural and original elements of the interpersonally constituted fabric of moral life: "the reactive feelings and attitudes [...] belong to involvement or participation with others in inter-personal human relationships."<sup>2</sup> Without affective reciprocal relations that matter to both parties, in which they are both invested and thus can

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1 References to the German edition of Nietzsche are to: (KSA) Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, in 15 Bänden, Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (eds.) (Berlin/München/New York: De Gruyter, 1980). I have relied on and modified the following translations of the *Analects*: *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, trans. by Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (New York: Random House, 1998); *The Analects*, trans. by Raymond Dawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. by Charles Muller, <http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/analects.html>; *Confucius Analects*, trans. by Edward Slingerland (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003). Chinese quotations are from the Chinese Text Project: <http://ctext.org/>.

2 P. F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," in *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Methuen & Co., 1974), p. 10.

potentially evoke negative reactive feelings in the self against the other, we would not be in the realm of the normal attribution of agency and responsibility. We usually do not resent what is considered to be outside of the other's efficacy.

Strawson describes resentment as a normal reaction to the other's injury or indifference. Resentment is experienced as a demand that the self places on the other, demanding her or his regard or good-will, while shame is experienced as the demand of the other placed on the self.<sup>3</sup> Resentment is an example establishing that the participant standpoint of ordinary moral life relies on internal justifications. The complex psycho-social phenomenon of resentment proves the necessitarian account of moral agency to be insufficient and the "obscure and panicky metaphysics of libertarianism" to be inane.<sup>4</sup>

An objective third-person perspective would bracket the participant perspective that encompasses resentment and gratitude, condemnation and forgiveness. This neutral impersonal attitude, associated with the overly theoretical viewpoint of determinism, would not include the negative and positive emotions that help make up the ordinary framework of moral life. It would also not encompass the space of reasons that includes the consideration of what is rational and reasonable to do through arguing, quarreling, and reasoning with others. In the objective attitude, which for Strawson is a useful resource to contextually adopt as a temporary stance depending on the situation, one does not reason with others as others. Others are not participants at all from this intellectualized viewpoint; they are the depersonalized objects of social policy, management, training, assessment, and treatment.<sup>5</sup>

Strawson, in his 1962 essay, did not examine questions of whether resentment is actually an elemental truth of human life, whether it is indeed normal or pathological, and whether and how resentment should be confronted

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3 Ibid., pp. 14-15.

4 Ibid., pp. 24-25.

5 Ibid., p. 9.

within the interpersonal first and second-person perspective of agents. These issues concerning the psycho-social bio-politics of resentment troubled earlier philosophical discourses. To take one more step back in time, the German phenomenologist Max Scheler contended in the early twentieth-century that resentment is a basic problem of factual ethical life even as it should not be considered a fundamental dimension of genuine ethical life.

Scheler rejected Kantian ethical formalism for the sake of a material and content centered value-ethics, grounded in an anti-naturalistic philosophical anthropology and notion of a material a priori. Yet Scheler modified a typical Neo-Kantian argumentative strategy in opposition to the hermeneutical life-philosophical emphasis on the immanent self-articulation and interpretation of life unfolded in the writings of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) and Friedrich Nietzsche. Scheler concludes that facticity threatens and overthrows (*Umsturz*) the ideal values with which it should be contrasted and contested.

In *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen* (*Ressentiment in the Formation of Morals*), first published in 1912, Scheler defined *ressentiment* as a pathological state of resentment, the potentiality for which varies according to the level of social-political equality and the stability of classes in society. In genuinely egalitarian societies or in stable class societies, i.e., in any society where persons accept their roles and places, there are fewer opportunities for pathologically resenting others in heightened states of envy, jealousy, vengefulness, and spitefulness. *Ressentiment* should not be associated with Christianity, Scheler argued against Nietzsche, but with its negation and the negation of the spiritual in modern bourgeois societies. Such societies are characterized by both a relative—yet still deficient—equality and the relentless competition to be better than others and feel superiority over one's neighbors.

Despite the limited and conditional origins of *ressentiment*, Scheler stressed the potential for wider outbreaks: "Through its very origin, *ressentiment* is

therefore chiefly confined to those who serve and are dominated at the moment, who fruitlessly resent the sting of authority. When it occurs elsewhere, it is either due to psychological contagion—and the spiritual venom of *ressentiment* is extremely contagious—or to the violent suppression of an impulse which subsequently revolts by 'embittering' and 'poisoning' the personality."<sup>6</sup>

Such a pathological psycho-social condition, which involves the fateful self-poisoning of the wounded mind, defies the basic moral character of humanity. Scheler remarked: "*Ressentiment* helps to subvert this eternal order in man's consciousness, to falsify its recognition, and to deflect its actualization."<sup>7</sup> In Scheler's account, accordingly, the facticity of *ressentiment* is the exception, and the ideal exhibited in solidarity, love, and mutual sympathy is normative. Scheler reverses Nietzsche's conclusion in the *Genealogy of Morals*. Approximating Kierkegaard's diagnosis of ordinary life as a spiritual sickness that calls for a transformative awakening to its absolute source in *Sickness unto Death*, Scheler concludes that it is the lack of the ultimate motive and object of action (that is, the divine) that generates the potential for radical *ressentiment*.

Scheler's conceptualization of *ressentiment* was formulated in response to Nietzsche's earlier diagnosis of resentment as a social-historically constituted yet basic element of ethical life. In Nietzsche's genealogy of the formation of morals and moral systems, the overcoming of resentment, revenge, and the ostensibly negative emotional states taught in religion and morality is not identified with the realization of a superior spiritual condition in relation to the eternal. The idea that one has overcome resentment, as Nietzsche repeatedly asserts of universal Christian love and socialist solidarity, is depicted as the further fulfillment and primary form of destructive *ressentiment*. Christian *ressentiment* runs so deep that it shapes the anti-Christian resentment of European modernity; as in

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6 Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, trans. by Lewis B. Coser and William W. Holdheim (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994), p. 48.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

Nietzsche's portrayal of the English psychologists who remain all too Christian in their enmity and rancor against Christianity.<sup>8</sup>

Nietzsche's conception of *ressentiment* encompasses much more than a deficiency of sympathy for the other and the psychologically morbid departure from the eternal depicted by Scheler. *Ressentiment* is, on the contrary, realized in the non-recognition of resentment; in not recognizing oneself as resentful and in perceiving others as motivated by a resentment that does not of course inform one's own attitudes and actions. Whereas resentment always has a particular resented object and a specific content and reference, *ressentiment* is a condition that has been detached from particular experiences of resentment and definite resented persons, groups, or objects. Paradoxically at first glance, Nietzsche claims that *ressentiment* is most characteristic of individuals and groups who believe they have overcome ordinary resentments.

The seething reactive psychophysical condition of *ressentiment*, according to Nietzsche, belongs to natures that lack the capacity to react and respond with ordinary active and reactive affects. *Ressentiment* is accordingly not the same as ordinary resentment. Nietzsche scholars can obscure the relation between the two when they overemphasize their distinction, since *ressentiment* is related to resentment; it is a transformation of ordinary feelings of resentment into a complex emotional-cognitive state. Nor is *ressentiment* the same as revenge, which for both Nietzsche and the early twentieth-century Nietzsche-influenced Chinese author Lǔ Xùn 鲁迅 (1881-1936) can be an expression of nobility.<sup>9</sup> *Ressentiment* is a general state of vengefulness against this world and life itself in Nietzsche's portrayal. Nietzsche accordingly describes in the *Genealogy* how the "slave revolt in morality" reverses the high and low and aims at the negation of

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8 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), I.10; KSA 5, p. 257.

9 Compare Chiu-ye Cheung, *Lu Xun: The Chinese "Gentle" Nietzsche* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 45.

the other rather than the affirmation of the self. This revolt against nobility of character originates in the incapacity of real revenge:

The *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge. While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is "outside," what is "different," what is "not itself"; and this No is its creative deed.<sup>10</sup>

The cultivation of an imaginary otherworldly revenge eventually culminates in real violence against others and the destruction and annihilation of alterity in Nietzsche's analysis.

To develop Nietzsche's argumentation in response to Scheler's objection, *ressentiment* remains operative in the consciousness of the eternal that does not recognize that it thinks and acts out of ordinary all too human motivations. These motives, as Nietzsche shows in the *Genealogy of Morals*, are temporal and transient. Human motives are generated and determined by biological, historical, and social forces and only secondarily formed by individual decision, rational agency, and ideal value.

In the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche diagnosed the *ressentiment* constitutive of conventional religion, morality, and the politics of equality. The logic of reciprocal recognition, equal exchange, and sacrifice of the one for the many requires and cultivates a reactive fear and envy of the other who must be tamed, disciplined, and brought under control or rejected, excluded, and eliminated as a hostile foreign power. The *ressentiment* of vengeful priests, their secularized heirs, and the manipulated masses provides the motivational basis for domination. Nietzsche contrasted this reactive yet cunning and skillful

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10 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I.10; KSA 5, p. 270.

resentment with the lordly affirmation of the self in the immanence of its own desires and vitality of life. Nietzsche's ethics of self-affirmation is asymmetrical in prioritizing the self of the other even as it undermines the reactive and calculative treatment of others. Noble self-affirmation does not live from negating the other. It affirms the other in an asymmetrical and non-calculative generosity and bounty born of its own excess and overflowing sense of self that Nietzsche compares in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to the bounteousness of natural phenomena such as the sun and water.

Nietzsche is criticized as a radically anti-egalitarian and hierarchical thinker by proponents of standard conceptions of socio-political equality, for instance, Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth, and praised as a postmodern thinker of an alterity and difference resisting the relentless logic of identity and enmity.<sup>11</sup> In this context, it is sensible to question whether Nietzsche's historical analysis presupposes an objectivizing stance that misses the internal or immanent character of interpersonal relations, as described by Strawson, and whether it overthrows the reciprocity and mutuality of self and other required by Scheler's ethical vision.

## 2. Nietzsche and the Resentment of "Confucian China"

Nietzsche's claim that moralism and religiosity are the higher achievements of resentment informed his understanding of Confucius 孔子 (551-479 BCE)—who is rarely mentioned in comparison to Indian figures—and Chinese culture more generally. In the passage on the "improvers of humanity" in the *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche interprets Confucius as a law-giver like other law-givers

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<sup>11</sup> I consider alterity and asymmetry in Confucian ethics from a different perspective 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), pp. 177-207.

such as Manu, Plato (C.427-C.347 BCE), and the founders of the three monotheistic faiths. Confucius is presented in this context as yet another immoral moralist. He becomes a symbol of priestly power who never doubted his right to lie in order to regulate the masses and bring them to conformity through breeding and taming techniques:

Neither Manu nor Plato nor Confucius nor the Jewish and Christian teachers have ever doubted their right to lie. They have not doubted that they had very different rights too. Expressed in a formula, one might say: all the means by which one has so far attempted to make mankind moral were through and through immoral.<sup>12</sup>

Confucius is also compared to the founders of political empires in an unpublished note from 1885. Nietzsche insists that "great artists of government" (*Regierungskünstler*) and power from Confucius to Napoleon use noble lies and moralistic deception to pacify the masses through physiological-spiritual programs of "spiritual enlightenment":

Spiritual enlightenment is an infallible means for making humans unsure, weaker in will, so they are more in need of company and support—in short, for developing the herd animal in humans. Therefore all great artists of government so far (Confucius in China, the imperium Romanum, Napoleon, the papacy at the time when it took an interest in power and not merely in the world), in the places where the dominant instincts have culminated so far, also employed spiritual enlightenment—at least let it have its way (like the popes of the Renaissance). The self-deception of the masses concerning this point, e.g., in every democracy,

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<sup>12</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. vii & 5; KSA 6, p. 102.

is extremely valuable: making humans smaller and more governable is desired as "progress"!<sup>13</sup>

Nietzsche interpreted China, which he described as "a country where large-scale discontentment and the capacity for change became extinct centuries ago," through the prism of a construction of enlightened power that destroys all that is individual and unique in reducing life to a banal equality and happiness.<sup>14</sup>

Akin then to Strawson's less dramatic argument about the role of resentment in normal interpersonal life, Nietzsche concluded that the apparent absence of resentment is in fact more problematic than its active or reactive presence. However, Nietzsche goes further than Strawson to the extent that the objective stance is not a justifiable if temporary departure from the participant perspective. It is a self-deceptive illusion of not having a perspective and not being a participant. Such a state is the result of discipline and training and the bundling and redoubling of ordinary resentments.

Further, altruistic attitudes are genealogically interpreted as dispositions that are more deeply motivated by *ressentiment*. In this setting, Nietzsche constructs and construes "Confucius" and "China" as warnings to Europe about the last fruits of resentment, i.e., of a condition where resentment and the reactive affects appear to have been tamed and trained. But the spiritual and enlightened conquest of these affects has not led to their overcoming. They are intensified and poisoned in becoming the invisible—and hence all the more powerful—motives operating behind the face of tranquility, equanimity, and altruism.

Playing with the Chinese expression *xiǎoxīn* (小心 "be careful"; taken too literally, "small heart"), Nietzsche depicted "late civilizations"—such as that of

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13 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 129; KSA 11, p. 570.

14 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.24, p. 49; KSA 3, p. 399.

the modern European who could only be perceived as distasteful and dwarfish by an ancient Greek—affecting a "smallness of heart."<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche maintained that the altruistic goodness and spiritual awakening promoted by Confucius and the Buddha had reduced the Chinese to passivity and an abject equality under an all-powerful despot, arguing that Europe faced a similar fate from its forces of political and spiritual enlightenment that "might easily establish Chinese conditions and a Chinese 'happiness.'"<sup>16</sup> In *Ecce Homo*, the self-denial and self-sacrifice distinctive of altruistic ethics is said to "deprive existence of its great character and would castrate men and reduce them to the level of desiccated Chinese stagnation."<sup>17</sup>

China and the Chinese are typically peripheral to Nietzsche's concerns. He more frequently employs Indian and Buddhist examples in his works. They move closer to the center of Nietzsche's geopolitics, which is centered in the Christian-Jewish world, when he linked the Chinese with the German and Jewish peoples as "priestly peoples" in the *Genealogy of Morals*.<sup>18</sup> In the context of his polemic against "decadence" characterized by *ressentiment*, and despite their difference in ability and rank, Nietzsche described them as "peoples with similar talents." Here Nietzsche is again describing a generalized priestly character or type. They are three different exemplars of "priestly nations" dominated by *ressentiment*. In most of his discussions of China, however, Nietzsche continues to use the language of ahistorical stasis and "Oriental" despotism developed by earlier German thinkers such as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831).

15 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 267; KSA 5, pp. 220-221.

16 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, I.24, p. 49; KSA 3, p. 399.

17 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), IV.4; KSA 6, p. 369.

18 "By contrast [with the Romans], the Jews were a priestly nation of *ressentiment* par excellence, possessing an unparalleled genius for popular morality: compare peoples with similar talents, such as the Chinese or the Germans, with the Jews, and you will realize who are first rate and who are fifth." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I.16; KSA 5, p. 286.

Granting that the validity of Nietzsche's assessment of Confucius is questionable, we should begin to appreciate the ambivalence at work in Nietzsche's dialectic of power and resentment. Nietzsche is commonly thought to be a thinker of power and even at times—although this is noticeably incorrect—an apologetic defender of established powers. In these passages, Nietzsche reveals existing power to be constituted and its constitution to rest in deception, illusion, and—in many cases—revenge and resentment. The masses, whose bodies have been shaped by discipline and whose minds have been manipulated by their own fears and feelings of resentment, become passive instruments of this formation and projection of power.

Resentment appears as a complex point of mediation in ethical life as it constitutes both power and weakness. Resentment grows from impotence and inability and remains operational through *ressentiment* even when it has assumed power. It is a misreading to conclude that power is necessarily noble in Nietzsche. On the contrary, power can be structured by and an expression of *ressentiment*. Such power poisons the self unable to freely and generously use it as it takes on pathological forms oppressive to the self as well as to others. Nietzsche repeatedly confronts this type of power that he stylizes as priestly power.<sup>19</sup> It is born of real suffering and trauma and poisons the wound in order to survive. Nevertheless, despite being evident in only a few rare historical moments, Nietzsche held on to the hope that freedom and nobility are accomplished in the genuine exercise of power. The genuine feeling of power in the self is contrasted with the myths and idols of the negation of power that signify its hidden and pathological exercise.

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19 See Eric S. Nelson, "Priestly Power and Damaged Life in Nietzsche and Adorno," in Andreas Urs Sommer (ed.), *Nietzsche: Philosoph der Kultur(en)? / Philosopher of Culture?* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 349-356.

### 3. Resentment, Recognition, and Ethical Life in the *Analects*

One of the most basic issues of ethical life appears to be the complex feeling of resentment. It has two dimensions: (1) the lack of acknowledgment and recognition from others and (2) how to cope with feelings of resentment in oneself and others. Scheler appeals to transcending these feelings of resentment through positive feelings of empathy and sympathy, even though Nietzsche identifies this kind of emotional transformation as a more deeply entrenched and poisonous form of resentment that he designates with the French word *ressentiment*. The emotional complex designated by *ressentiment* is a kind of character and thus differs from ordinary feelings of resentment. Nietzsche's critique of *ressentiment* could be potentially applied to the *Analects* (*Lúnyǔ* 論語), a diverse fragmentary compilation that is attributed to Confucius, as the *Analects* suggested in the spirit of Nietzsche. The *Analects* compared the everyday practice of *Confucian* values to cannibalism in *A Madman's Diary* (*Kuáng rén Rìjì* 狂人日記), one of his most influential short stories and—like *The True Story of Ah Q* (*Ā Q Zhèngzhuàn* 阿Q正傳)—a story of a culture dominated by *ressentiment*.<sup>20</sup>

Nietzsche and the *Analects* are certainly correct that a particular understanding and institutionalization of Confucian morality can lead to weakened and pathological conditions of resentful passivity in which the self is burdened by all the cares and obligations of paternal, familial, and communal expectations. However, the story of "Confucian *ressentiment*" told by Nietzsche and the *Analects* becomes more complicated if we turn to the *Analects* and the Confucian classics. Several significant passages propose the necessity of

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20 There is a rich and varied literature concerning the *Analects*, Nietzsche, and *ressentiment*; for example, see Chiu-ye Cheung, *Lu Xun: The Chinese "Gentle" Nietzsche*, p. 59; Kirk A. Denton, *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature: Hu Feng and Lu Ling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 58; Peter Button, *Configurations of the Real in Chinese Literary and Aesthetic Modernity* (Leiden: Brill Press, 2009), pp. 98-99.

countering various reactive feelings of resentment. In the very first lines of the *Analects*, Confucius is recorded as asserting:

學而時習之，不亦說乎？有朋自遠方來，不亦樂乎？人不知而不  
愠，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 (*yùn 愠*) at other's failure to recognize (*bùzhī 不知*) one, is this not to be a gentleman (*jūnzǐ 君子*)?<sup>21</sup>

In *Analects* 1.1, being noble, or ethically exemplary, is explicitly linked with not being *yùn*, which has been translated as indignant, feeling hurt, to be bothered, and resentful. This feeling of resentment is linked to *bùzhī*, which means that the other does not "know" one, the other's lack or denial of recognition and appreciation. The conception that ethical exemplarity requires responding to the absence or privation of something significant for oneself from the other without resentment is likewise found in 1.16:

不患人之不己知，患不知人也。

I do not worry (*huàn 患*) about not being recognized. I worry (*huàn 患*) about not recognizing (*bùzhī 不知*) others.<sup>22</sup>

In this passage, recognition is again the occasion for another type of worry that is not typically directly translatable as resentment. *Huàn* can mean to suffer from

<sup>21</sup> *Analects*, 1.1.

<sup>22</sup> *Analects*, 1.16.

(illness, misfortune, disease), to be troubled by, or—as possible in its first occurrence—something very much like resentment. In this passage, *huàn* indicates an inappropriate resentment in its first use and an appropriate being worried in its second use.

In *Mencius* 4B28.7, *huàn* operates as a type of anxiousness contrasted with *yōu* 憂, which has an overlapping yet divergent range of meanings: anxiety, worry, being bereft, and sorrow. Mencius 孟子 (C.371-C.289 BCE) distinguishes having anxieties and perturbed emotional states from the exemplary person's moral concern for benevolence and propriety that is a task of a lifetime.<sup>23</sup> Benevolence (*rén* 仁), as Master Zēng 曾子 stated in the *Analects*, is a heavy burden that ends only with death.<sup>24</sup> The path of virtue is a difficult undertaking that is pursued without anxieties or resentment against heaven and humans.

Resentment is an anxiety provoking affliction bound up with processes of misrecognition or the perception of a lack of recognition. Early Confucian texts indicate an asymmetrical strategy of dismantling compounds of resentment by minimizing what is expected from others while intensifying what one expects of oneself. Instead of focusing on what others ostensibly owe one, and the slights one might have received from this due and regard not being given, we are asked to turn our attention to whether and how we are recognizing the other.

In *Analects* 1.16, the asymmetrical priority of the other over the self is upheld. This asymmetry is not a pure self-sacrifice or self-negation; nor is it the asymmetry of the self and God that concerns Kierkegaard and Levinas. Asymmetry is conceived 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 otherness. The vitality and motivation of moral life arises

<sup>23</sup> *Mencius* 4B28.7; *Mengzi: with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. by Bryan W. Van Norden (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2008), p. 112.

<sup>24</sup> *Analects*, 8.7.

from the self being concerned for itself and its ethical character in its relations with and concern for others. It is not by the "slave-morality" of negating ordinary desires and reactive affects that the ethical is achieved.

As Strawson and the early Confucians each realize in their own way, it is in effect these ordinary non-heroic and mundane motives that shape and encourage becoming an ethical self conceived of as a responsible participant in the everyday life of the family and community. But where Strawson emphasized the role of reactive feelings in the first-person participant perspective that he argues are necessary to moral life, Confucians prioritize transforming reactive affects within the participant perspective without appealing to notions of a third-person neutrality, a God's eye transcendent perspective, or a contextless objective point of view from nowhere.

Anglo-American moral philosophers, such as Strawson and Bernard Williams (1929-2003), have rejected the intellectualism of Kantian deontological and consequentialist moral theory. They argue that intellectualist moral theories require inappropriately distancing the agent from her or his emotional life. Owen Flanagan notes in "Destructive Emotions" how self-transformation through structuring one's cognitions and affects, including transfiguring the emotions, is not only a basic characteristic of Eastern ethics but of traditions of moral wisdom.<sup>25</sup> Both for the Tibetan Buddhism Flanagan considers in his essay and for Confucianism, working through and eliminating negative emotions in cognitive-affective restructuring is not alienation from unchangeable "natural" states. Receptively working with one's emotions belongs to the dynamic of moral wisdom itself.

A third word associated with sentiments of resentment is evident in passages concerning one's attitude toward one's parents and the virtuous brothers Bóyí 伯

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25 Owen Flanagan, "Destructive Emotions," *Consciousness and Emotions*, 1, 2 (2000), p. 277.  
DOI: 10.1075/ce.1.2.05fla

夷 and Shūqí 叔齊.<sup>26</sup> Yuàn 怨 means to blame, complain, and resent and Confucius is portrayed as associating the absence of the feeling of resentment with benevolence or humaneness (*rén*) itself. In *Analects* 7.15, it is said that the two brothers did not feel resentment (*yuàn*) but: "They sought and obtained humaneness, what would they resent?" In 5:23, it is said that they "did not recall old grievances, and so there was little resentment (*yuàn*) against them." A fourth less commonly used term in the classical literature is *fèn* 憤. It also shares this sense of not angering others or of not becoming the cause of resentment and enmity in others.

This general concern is interpreted ethically in the distinction between gratitude and resentment in the dàoshù 道術 chapter of the *New Writings* (*Xīnshū* 新書), a political treatise by the early Han dynasty scholar Jiǎ Yì 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 (*yuàn*)."<sup>27</sup>

Confucius depicts how lower forms of conduct that cause resentment in others can be avoided by expecting much of oneself and little of others.<sup>28</sup> The ethical concern with not producing and furthering resentment in the other is not adequately elucidated in Nietzsche's genealogy of how reactive emotions have structured and deformed ethical life. Passages such as *Analects* 5.23 illustrate how action for the other, done out of what Scheler would have described as sympathy, is a basic strategy of reducing resentfulness against others and within oneself.

26 Respectively, *Analects*, 4.18, 5.23 and 7.15.

27 "施行得理，謂之德。反德為怨。"; Wang Xingguo 王興國, *Jia Yi ping zhuan* 賈誼評傳 (Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 1992), p. 228.

28 *Analects*, 15.15.

The strategy of a self-interestedness oriented towards the other, conceived as conjoined and complementary rather than as irreconcilable contraries in early Confucian ethics, introduces a modification to how resentment should be conceptualized in contrast to the Western either-or between selfishness and selflessness. According to this interpretation, Confucian ethics suggests that reducing resentment in others reduces its being turned against oneself by others. In the image of "selling resentment" as "buying disaster," the ethical is conjoined with pragmatic considerations. Distinguishing these two dimensions, the idea is that engaging in this social interactive process of undermining the causes of resentment would accomplish more than pragmatically decreasing resentment against oneself. It would, furthermore, undo the feverish state of resentment in oneself. Undoing resentment is therefore a shared social project instead of the romantic task of the heroic, isolated, noble individual.

#### 4. Confucius contra Nietzsche?

One could well provide reasons for the positive role of resentment in social life or for an equality of strength that is articulated through the affirmation of the nobility and generosity of the self are two strategies for modifying Nietzsche's genealogical critique of morality. A different strategy is suggested by the analysis of resentment unfolded in the *Analects*.

Nietzsche distinguishes two different ideals of character: the reactive resentful character and the affirmative lordly one. The early *rú* 儒 or "Confucian" authors of the *Analects* attributed to Confucius likewise interpreted the distinction between the noble person (*jūnzǐ*) and the petty person (*xiǎorén* 小人), the "small person" who is unable to exhibit "smallness of heart," in light of the question of resentment. The petty or ignoble person is portrayed as resenting being kept at a distance. The petty act out of a small-minded self-interest and

mean-spirited feelings of resentment towards others in an anxious and insecure self-centered and partisan search for profits, favors, comforts, and accolades. As the *Great Learning* (*Dàxué* 大學) reconfirms, contrasting the path of resentment with that of kindness and tolerance, animosity and resentment undermine the capacity to achieve a straightness of mind and wholeness of character.<sup>29</sup>

The authors of the *Analects* recognized the pervasiveness of resentment under certain conditions and the ethical requirement to challenge it 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). Nietzsche did not recognize the latter as being part of the noble character, yet this is emphasized in the Confucian understanding of resentment and related affects, some of which are worthy of praise such as indignation against injustice and viciousness, which is understood through a variety of terms: *yùn* (to be indignant, to feel hurt or discontented by), *yuàn* (to blame, to complain of), *fèn* (to be indignant or angered), and *huàn* and *yōu* (to suffer, be worried or troubled by).

Overcoming resentment in oneself as well as in others is a primary element of becoming a gentleman, who as Mencius notes does not resent heaven or humans, and genuinely noble in the ethical sense for Confucius, in contrast with the petty person fixated on his or her own concerns. It accordingly should be part of a well-rounded account of resisting and overcoming resentment. The recognition of asymmetry necessary for overcoming resentment can be seen in *Analects* 1.1 and 1.16. To this extent, early Confucian literati have a more 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 humaneness (*rén*).

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<sup>29</sup> See particularly sections 7 and 10; *Ta Hsüeh and Chung Yung: The Highest Order of Cultivation and On the Practice of the Mean*, trans. by Andrew Plaks (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 11, 17-18.

The early Confucian model of self-affirmation through cognitive-affective self-rectification suggests an alternative to Scheler's appeal to the eternal and Nietzsche's underestimation of the ethics of the other. 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, which 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 of exchange.

The Confucian ethical point of view relies on the reciprocity (*shù* 恕) of seeing the other as being analogous to oneself. This is not, however, the symmetry of a conditional 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 is, to expect and demand more of oneself than of others, such that the other's lack of recognition and appreciation is not perceived as 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 mutuality (*shù*)—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:

不患無位，患所以立；不患莫己知，求為可知也。

I do not resent being unrecognized; I seek to be fit to be recognized.<sup>30</sup>

The project of self-cultivation in the *Analects* encompasses resisting reactive feelings in the self even as it calls for asymmetrically recognizing the difficulty of not having such reactive feelings under challenging life-conditions. We are thus told that: "To be poor without resentment (*yuàn*) is difficult. To be rich without arrogance is easy."<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, despite the relative ease and difficulty involved, the wealthy are more likely to be arrogant than the poor resentful in the Confucian understanding. The powerful fail to recognize and show reverence for the weak and destitute, which reveals a pettiness and lack of appropriate ethical self-cultivation.

The "petty person" is small by faulting and blaming others whereas the exemplary person reflectively turns blame into an opportunity for self-examination. "Pettiness" reveals itself to be a moral rather than a class designation in the *Analects* to the extent 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. Contrary to existing conservative discourses of resentment, early Confucian ethics is more concerned with the resentment of the rich and the powerful than the poor and the weak who deserve benevolence and equity rather than blame, condemnation, and the suffering too often inflicted upon them.

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<sup>30</sup> *Analects*, 4.14.

<sup>31</sup> *Analects*, 14.10.

## 5. Is the Ethical the Ultimate Form of Ressentiment?

According to Nietzsche, in the *Genealogy of Morals*, what is conventionally conceived to be moral and the highest good is in fact lowly and only the ultimate realization of *ressentiment*. Indeed, impartial and universalized love is the highest fulfillment of *ressentiment*. This objection, despite Nietzsche's own understanding of Confucius, misses the point of early Confucian discourses insofar as they reject Mohist doctrines of an impartial universal love as insufficient for caring for others and for oneself. The universal ethical point of view or a completely 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 rather than an undifferentiating objective stance or an equalizing global feeling of love or sympathy. Impartiality does not entail neutrality; it requires being partial for those for whom one has greater responsibility.

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* (*Xiàojīng* 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 (*xiūshēn* 修身).<sup>32</sup> Familial reverence, the medium of moral life and its

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32 *Xiaojing*, ch. 4; *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*, trans. by Henry Rosemont, and Roger T. Ames (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), p. 107.

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.<sup>33</sup>

Scheler rejected Nietzsche's thesis of the ascetic nature of altruism, distinguishing genuine sacrifice for the other from the domination of the other that occurs in the name of a higher good that is in reality born of *ressentiment*. Scheler accordingly claims that in his work on *ressentiment*: "I pointed out that it is precisely this aspect of true sacrifice which distinguishes true asceticism from the illusory asceticism of *ressentiment*."<sup>34</sup> The distinction between appropriate and inappropriate self-sacrifice reflects Scheler's strategy of differentiating a genuine form of ideal values that would evade Nietzsche's critical suspicions. This escape, however, presupposes that which Nietzsche has placed in doubt: a transcendent realm of ideal spiritual values and the eternal.

A different strategy to those of Scheler and Nietzsche is indicated in the early Confucian discourse of resentment. 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 rather recognized and confronted within the very workings of the self. In early Confucian philosophy, ethical reflection and judgment have need of a realistic yet 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 *Xú Gàn* 徐幹 (171-218) articulated his *Balanced Discourses* (*Zhònglùn* 中論) how sociability—listening to others

33 Compare Paul R. Goldin, *Confucianism* (Durham: Acumen, 2011), p. 35.

34 Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-formal Ethics of Values* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985), p. 231.

and attuning one's feelings in relation to others—furthers and constitutes wisdom.<sup>35</sup>

It is better to cause resentment in others than to do wrong, such as—in an example in the *biǎojì* 表記 chapter of the *Book of Rites* (*Lǐjì* 禮記)—causing resentment by refusing to make a promise that cannot be fulfilled. Wisdom includes not being an unnecessary cause of the other's resentment. This wisdom extends to the art of government that needs action while minimizing "animosity and resentment."<sup>36</sup> It encompasses even the king's ability to govern. Mencius, as we have seen, and Xúnzǐ 荀子 (313-238 BCE) 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 concern with counteracting and lessening provoking reactive feelings in others in order to maintain the fabric of everyday life and stable government is utilized in Confucian arguments for the necessity of ritual, music, and poetry for moral life. These practices are not secondary ornamental considerations, as they instruct and orient agents, helping them to appropriately regulate their emotions. The rituals of everyday interactions and ritual propriety (*lǐ* 禮) accomplish much more than a regulation of the emotions. 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* (*Shī Jīng* 詩經) is centered in an appeal to their function in promoting ethical self-cultivation and balancing nature and nurture. The classic songs of Zhōu 周 do not serve to conservatively reinforce the conformity of traditional tastes. Poetry

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35 Xu Gan, *Balanced Discourses: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. by John Makeham (Beijing and New Haven: Foreign Language Press and Yale University Press, 2002), p. 7.

36 *Xiaojing*, ch. 1; *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*, p. 105.

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 (*yuàn*).<sup>37</sup>

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, which also concerned Nietzsche, and not feigning a moral condition one does not understand. In *Analects* 5.25, Confucius is said to explain:

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: Zuǒ Qiūmíng found them shameful, and I also find them shameful. Concealing resentment (*yuàn*) and befriending the person resented (*yuàn*): Zuǒ Qiūmíng found them shameful, and I also find them shameful.<sup>38</sup>

The Confucian critique of flattery and obsequiousness, as 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 Nietzsche and early Confucianism. James S. Hans has argued that both appreciate the reality and mechanisms of resentment in ordinary moral life. Neither employs guilt—the resentment against resentment—in a futile and toxic attempt to cure it and better humanity through

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<sup>37</sup> *Analects*, 17.8.

<sup>38</sup> *Analects*, 5.25.

external discipline and internal self-negation.<sup>39</sup> Both rely on their own variety of a project of individual and personal self-cultivation that encompasses emotion and reason. I would not go so far as Hans' assertion that each practice of individuation occurs in an "aesthetic context without ground," since there is no existential abyss in Confucian thought and self-cultivation is more than aesthetic. Cultivation occurs in and responds to a web of aesthetic, ethical, and psychological conditions and claims.<sup>40</sup>

Nietzsche and early Confucian thought both highlight the self-cultivation of genuineness and generosity out of self-affirmation and reject motivations formed by the negation of the other. They diverge insofar as Nietzsche performatively and evocatively focuses our concern on our own individuality in opposition to social conventions and pragmatic accommodations, whereas Confucians demonstrate how social rituals and conventions are a principal vehicle of ethical individuation rather than being mere conformity or a prudential self-betrayal.

It might be argued in response to such a Confucian critique of Nietzsche that Nietzsche highlights the non-calculative generosity of the cultivated noble self. For example, Nietzsche's Zarathustra is an exemplar of the practice of self-cultivation (*Bildung*) that develops the highest bestowing virtue, which naturally and generously pours forth its gifts like the sun, without any expectation of return or exchange. There are of course many passages in praise of self-overflowing virtue in Nietzsche's works, and such virtue is a key element of Nietzschean self-cultivation.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, Nietzschean virtues always proceed from the self to the other without the Confucian concern with or recognition of the asymmetrical mutuality (*shù*) of self and other in which ethics also proceeds from the other to the self.

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39 James S. Hans, *Contextual Authority and Aesthetic Truth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 337.

40 *Ibid.*

41 See, for instance, Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), sections 376 and 587.

Nietzschean virtues of friendship and generosity are arguably akin to Confucian *shù* in sharing with others without calculation or an instrumental expectation of receiving something in return. They diverge from a Confucian perspective insofar as Nietzsche does not consider adequately articulate the "push" or extension (*tuī* 推) that requires seeing and interpreting oneself from the other's perspective and extending one's responsiveness to widening circles of beings from the family to humanity and to the universe itself in the Neo-Confucian interpretation of Mèngzǐ's heart-mind. The non-calculating and incalculable reciprocity (*shù*) between self and other is a basic feature of Confucian ethics that makes it a significant alternative to Western ethical models.

We can still find traces of the early Confucian discourse of recognition and resentment in later Neo-Confucian texts that reconfirm the affinity and difference between the asymmetrical sociality of Confucian ethics and the asymmetrical individualism of Nietzschean ethics. Wáng Yángmíng 王陽明 (1472-1528), 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 towards them, since they are our best teachers, and to move others to improve themselves without fault-finding and without making them feel shame and resentment.<sup>42</sup>

## 6. Confucian Ethics and the Politics of Resentment

In the early Confucian tradition of moral reflection, resentment is overcome through recognition. To know the self undermines negative affects against others

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42 Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Readings from the Lu-Wang School of Neo-Confucianism* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009), p. 176.

and the course of "heaven" (*tiān* 天, which should be understood as signifying something closer to "nature" than to a spiritual realm). Xúnzǐ accordingly stated:

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 (*zhī*) themselves do not resent (*yuàn*) 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.<sup>43</sup>

In contrast to standard interpretations of Nietzsche's philosophy, 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 "heaven" (*tiān*) in early Confucian writings, such as Xúnzǐ's quoted above. Such addresses do not appeal to an otherworldly transcendence or eternity but rely on the immanent course and order of the world.

Scheler amended his philosophical anthropology with its emergent levels of the organic with a transcendent appeal to metaphysics and religion to introduce and justify his vision of personalism. Confucian ethics accomplishes in an earthy, immanent, and more modest manner what Western religious thinkers, such as Scheler's appeal to the eternal, require of the transcendent and eternal.<sup>44</sup> 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.

43 Xunzi, 4.5; Xunzi, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol. 1, trans. by John Knoblock (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 188.

44 I examine the affinities (more evident in Levinas's Jewish writings) and tensions (more visible in his philosophical writings) between immanence and transcendence in Confucian and Levinasian ethics in "Levinas and Early Confucian Ethics," pp. 177-207.

Historically, the *rú* 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*. For instance, prioritizing the ethical while still connecting it with the pragmatic and instrumental, Confucius is said to remark: "If there is equality, there will be no poverty; where there is peace, there is no lack of population."<sup>45</sup>

They are in particular voiced in the book associated with Mencius. Asymmetrical ethics appears there in the context of the self's natural responsiveness and cultivated responsibility toward others. For Mencius, the cognitive-affective economy of humans is predisposed toward ethics without the appeal to the transcendent that Scheler wielded against Nietzsche's skepticism. It is, to adopt a phrase from Owen Flanagan, "naturally structured for morality."<sup>46</sup>

The genuine ethically exemplary 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 opening passages of the book of *Mencius*, it is not the people but the flawed King Huì of Liáng 梁惠王 who is filled with narrow desires, limited self-interest, and resentment against his people and neighboring kings. King Huì 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 Mencius reveals to the king's discomfort in their conversation, King Huì is affectively and reflectively unwilling to be responsive to and take responsibility for those affected by his misuse of his position, power, and wealth.

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<sup>45</sup> *Analects* 16.2.

<sup>46</sup> Owen Flanagan, "Destructive Emotions," p. 269.

## 7. Conclusion

The line of argumentation from the *Mencius* discussed above continues to have contemporary ethical and political significance. Ideological uses of the "politics of resentment" and even Nietzsche's conception of the smoldering condition of *ressentiment* fail to sufficiently analyze the dialectic of *ressentiment*. The early Confucians maintain 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, I think, in contemporary conservative discourses concerning the distribution of wealth and power that tend to blame the poor, the weak, and the voiceless for their condition.

On the basis of these alternate "critical" and transformative tendencies articulated in the classical *rú* 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 asymmetrical claims of privilege that serve as an illegitimate justification or excuse for opposing greater fairness and equity among the people. Early Confucian ethics can accomplish this task and be a "critical ethics" by contesting and deconstructing instead of furthering resentment and the condition of *ressentiment* that it promotes. ♦

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