Virtuous Contempt (*wu* 惡) in the *Analects*[†]

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> "Hate here means dislike, without any connotation of ill will."
> --Wing-tsit Chan, *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*

> "When you love a man you want him to live;
> when you despise him you want him to die."
> –Kongzi, *Analects* 12.10

Much is said about what Kongzi liked or cherished. Kongzi revered the rituals of the Zhou. He cherished tradition and classical music. He loved the *Odes*. He enjoyed a good swim. Far less is said, however, about what he despised or held in contempt (*wu* 惡). Yet contempt appears in the oldest stratum of the *Analects* as a disposition or virtue of moral exemplars. We are told, rather unambiguously, that "only the humane can love others, or despise them" (4.3). Nevertheless, the virtue of contempt is seldom discussed in the secondary literature; more prominent are discussions of other virtues, such as being loyal, filial, or sincere.

In this chapter, I will argue that understanding the role of despising or contempt in the *Analects* is important in appreciating Kongzi's *dao* in two related though distinct ways. First, I will argue that in parts of the *Analects* morally exemplary individuals (such as the nobleman) are straightforwardly described as despising and holding certain individuals in contempt. Second, I will suggest that reflecting on the *targets* of contempt in the text might help to uncover some of the tacit worries that Kongzi may have had concerning his own teachings on self-cultivation. Specifically, I will argue that trying to embody Kongzi's teachings—including mastering the ritual minutiae of the waning Zhou high culture—risks making one pedantic, pretentious, and glib, and that this helps us understand why such individuals are held out for particular contempt in the text. In the concluding section, I state more general reasons why we might consider certain negatively valenced emotions such as contempt to be morally laudable.

I

The first instances of the character *wu* 惡 occur in Book IV of the *Analects*, considered to be part of the earliest stratum of the text—perhaps its historical core (Brooks 1998). I will examine them in turn.

[†] Penultimate draft. Forthcoming in *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Justin Tiwald.

子曰：「唯仁者，能好人，能惡人。」
4.3 – The Master said, “Only the humane can love people, and despise (*wu* 惡) them.”

There are two things to note here at the outset.[1] First, throughout this paper, I will be translating *wu* as ‘despising’ when it is used as a verb and ‘contempt’ when used as a noun.[2] By contrast, all of the scholars and commentators I discuss below translate it as ‘hate’ and ‘hatred’. The latter terms can be misleading. Hatred can give the impression of strong or severe dislike, even hostility, without any judgment as to the true merits of the target of one’s hatred.[3] By contrast, contempt (and cognates such as disdain and scorn) suggest that the target of one’s attitude is base, vile, or unworthy. It thus includes an evaluative dimension, which is crucial to understanding *wu* in the *Analects*. As we shall see, the type of scorn and contempt that we find in the text is clearly toward individuals who are judged to merit these attitudes owing to morally questionable or vicious aspects of their character.

Second, the word ‘only’ 唯 in this passage makes it clear that ‘loving’ and ‘despising’ should be understood as ‘properly loving’ and ‘properly despising’. After all, each of us is certainly *capable* of feeling love and contempt, so without the ‘only’ the passage would seem to be superfluous. Kongzi does not say here that the humane person will *in fact* love or despise others, only that he is able to do so justifiably or accurately. Nevertheless, it seems hard to read the passage as suggesting a mere capacity to experience such emotions. Rather, this passage seems to maintain that, whereas all of us are capable of feeling love and contempt, only a *ren* person targets these emotions correctly.

Even though this is a standard way of parsing the passage, there is no consensus on how to make sense of the passage so parsed. Some more or less agree with that the passage should be understood as claiming that only the humane person properly loves and despises. For example, Chichung Huang simple notes that the humane person ‘loves good men and loathes evil men’ (Huang 67), thus making the evaluative dimensions obvious. Similarly, Brooks & Brooks comment that *ren* (what I am translating as humane) at this point “is not niceness, though it evolves in that direction. It confers a capacity to judge others… Enthusiasm for right implies antagonism (hatred, wu 惡) for its opposite” (Brooks, 13). They add that “hatred, like courage, is a classic virtue… directed at rivals… but mostly the standard crowd: carpers, whiners, swaggerers, bullies; the specious, pushy, and insinuating” (Brooks & Brooks 1998, 165).

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[1] This passage is paired with the next, 4.4, which reads: 子曰：「苟志於仁矣，無惡也。」”The Master said, ’Those committed to becoming humane lack maliciousness (*wu* 惡).’” This might seem to contradict 4.3. However, the main message of 4.3 is the capacity of the humane person to properly judge others, or the accuracy of the humane person’s feelings. The main message of 4.4 concerns the capacity for persons committed to humaneness to have malevolent characters or do malicious things. My thanks to Alexus McLeod for pressing me to clarify my understanding of the relationship between these passages.

[2] Some might take issue with ‘love’ as a translation for *hao*. I think it works fine in these passages, as it is most naturally read as conveying care, benevolence, and admiration, as opposed to romantic affection or attraction.

[3] My thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing this issue.

Others draw a distinction between 'despising others' and 'despising them with malice'. Edward Slingerland, for example, draws on the commentarial tradition and argues that the humane person hates others accurately and impartially, able to love without envy and despise without malice (Slingerland 30). Similarly, according to Yong Huang,

> … Confucius claimed that 'only a person of *ren* knows how to love people and hate people'… from the Confucian point of view, 'hate', just as 'love', is a kind of love in a more general sense. On the one hand, the most fundamental meaning of *ren* is to love, and so the person of *ren* who knows how to love and hate is a loving person; on the other hand, as Wing-tsit Chan already pointed out, 'hate' here does not have any connotation of ill will (see Chan, 1963, p. 25, note 53). It is rather one's profound feeling of regret that one's beloved moral patient lacks what it should have. So the reason that Confucianism wants to make distinction or discrimination is not to decide whom or what we should love or love more and whom or what we should not love or love less; it is rather to decide how to love everyone and everything in ways most appropriate to the person or thing. (Huang 2005, 39)

Huang clearly offers a different interpretation here. He draws a parallel with the doctrine of loving with distinctions—where one is to love one's family foremost, and then one's neighbors, village, prefecture, etc., and so on for all people in variegated ways and according to the kind of person they are. Thus, according to Huang, *wu* in 4.3 should not be taken to denote a feeling distinct from love, but rather a highly attenuated and regretful form of love for those outside one's moral circle (and perhaps beyond one's ability to influence or improve).

In his paper, Huang cites Wing-tsit Chan's interpretation of this passage in *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*. Chan, in turn, cites a passage in the *Da Xue* 大學 (or *Great Learning*) which describes a minister who seems to be wholly undeserving of praise: instead of exalting men of worth, this minister envies and hates them, and blocks their advancement at every turn. Such callous and petty ministers, we are told, threaten to undermine the administration of the empire and diminish the well-being of its populace, putting all in jeopardy. In such a situation,

> It is only the truly virtuous man who can send away such a man and banish him, driving him out among the barbarous tribes around, determined not to dwell along with him in the Middle Kingdom. This is in accordance with the saying, "It is only the truly virtuous man who can love or who can hate others." To see men of worth and not be able to raise them to office; to raise them to office, but not to do so quickly:-this is disrespectful. To see bad men and not be able to remove them; to remove them, but not to do so to a distance:-this is weakness. To love those whom men hate, and to hate those whom men love;-this is to outrage the natural feeling of men. (Legge, 341-342)

Chan's interpretation is, on the face of it, consistent with this passage, insofar as there is no explicit indication of malice toward such contemptible ministers. However, there is also nothing at all to suggest the absence of malice either. The more natural reading is that the truly virtuous

man banishes such individuals from the realm because they are despicable, and it is natural to feel malice toward individuals who have so blatantly endangered the realm. Indeed, one can argue that failing to feel some malice toward such despicable individuals would mark a moral defect rather than a laudable trait of character. So it's not clear how this passage reflects an idea of 'hatred without malice', and therefore how this supports Chan's reading that *wu* in *Analects* 4.3 does not connote a sense of ill will toward others. The text of the *Da Xue* cannot settle the interpretive issue.

Yet this reading remains widespread, and many others similarly try to finesse away any real force behind the despising mentioned in this passage.[4] According to Tu Wei-ming, for example,

> …. only those of *jen* [*ren*] know how to love men and how to hate them (4:3), for the feelings of love and hate can be impartially expressed as fitting responses to concrete situations only by those who have reached the highest level of morality. This is predicated on the moral principle that those who sincerely strive to become *jen* abstain from evil will (or, if you wish, hatred); as a result, they can respond to a value-laden and emotion-charged situation in a disinterested but compassionate manner. The paradox, rather than obscurity, is quite understandable in terms of Confucius' characterization of the hyperhonest villager as the spoiler of virtue (17: 13). A man often refuses to tolerate evil because he has no evil will toward others; his ability to hate is thus a true indication that he has no penned up hatred in his heart. (Tu 1981, 49)

There are many remarkable features of Tu's interpretation. In addition to stressing (as Slingerland does) that love and hate are arrived at impartially (a claim that seems plausible), Tu claims that this passage is not about persons but about *concrete situations*. This seems plainly false; Kongzi is clearly talking about *persons* when he says only the humane person is capable of 好人 / 惡人. More importantly, though, Tu argues that a *ren* [humane] person abides by a moral principle to abstain from hatred. If this is right, though, we are left with an apparent paradox: if, by stipulation, a *ren* person must strive to abstain from ill will or hatred, how is it that the *ren* person *alone* is capable of it? Tu's explanation is opaque (in part because it is not clear whether, in the final sentence, Tu is referring to the *ren* person or the hyperhonest villager); we're told that a man is often intolerant of evil because he lacks hatred himself, the implication being (perhaps) that having hatred would make one tolerant of evil in others. There may be some argument to support this claim, but none can be found in this passage.

Finally, Chad Hansen (1993) also gives a deflationary reading of this passage, though along different lines. As with the interpretations just canvassed, he also downplays the emotional and aversive aspects of *wu*, but to an entirely different degree. For Hansen reads this passage in light of the practice of the notion 'rectifying names' or 'correcting names' (e.g.

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[4] Chang, Huang, and Tu (discussed next) are not outliers in their readings, but are instead following the orthodox reading based on the commentarial tradition. My thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting that I note this. For reasons I outline below, I believe the orthodox reading is false.

Analects 13.3). According to his reading, the terms *hao* and *wu* in *Analects* 4.3 do not refer to any psychological states of the *ren* person at all—let alone any emotional or reactive ones. Instead, Hansen argues that *Analects* 4.3 makes a claim about who it is that can properly rectify evaluatively-laden terms such as *hao* and *wu* such that they are directed at proper referents in the world. Put another way, "*ren* enables one to class people as good and bad (4:3)" and thus correctly guide the actions of others (Hansen 1993, 69). In other words, Hansen might paraphrase 4.3 as follows: "Only the *ren* person is capable of properly applying the terms 'loveable' and 'despicable' to individuals". Hansen's theory, if correct, would only be derivative of the passage's most basic, literal meaning. We could indeed classify individuals as loveable or despicable based upon a *ren* person's reactions and attitudes toward them; nevertheless, the passage itself neither invokes the notion of rectifying names nor seems interpretable in light of that doctrine.

What's notable in all of these interpretations is a reluctance to embrace the most straightforward, literal reading of the passage—that a *ren* person really (and properly) *despises* some people. Why do these scholars (and many others besides) eschew such a reading? One reason might be that the more literal interpretation is itself not without some problems. For example, it seems in tension with other passages, such as 12.22, where Kongzi states that *ren* individuals love others (without mention of despising). If we take these other passages seriously, then perhaps we should mitigate the contempt mentioned in 4.3. This seems to be Huang's rationale: since the most fundamental meaning of *ren* is to love others, it is unlikely that the *wu* mentioned in 4.3 is really something like contempt. However, even if Huang is right about the fundamental meaning of *ren* (I doubt there is such a fundamental meaning), this doesn't preclude the possibility that a *ren* person will have feelings or judgments other than love. (Indeed, as I shall argue later on, I believe there are independent reasons to think that a moral exemplar *ought* to be capable of such feelings or judgments lest she be seen, in some deep and problematic sense, as morally defective.)

More importantly, other passages in the *Analects* suggest that the text is not hostile to taking firm approaches to moral transgressions—and the transgressors themselves. The general idea running through some of the interpretations above—namely, that some version of love is the proper response to any and all persons or situations—is not supported in the text. Instead, different behaviors merit different responses, as articulated in the following passage:

> 或曰：「以德報怨，何如？」子曰：「何以報德？以直報怨，以德報德。」
> 14.34 – Someone asked, "The saying 'requite malice with kindness'—what do you make of that?" The Mater replied, "How to requite kindness, then? Requite malice with uprightness, and kindness with kindness."

As Ted Slingerland puts it, "Each type of behavior has a response that is proper to it: injury should be met with sternness, whereas kindness is to be rewarded with kindness. Failure to

discriminate in this way is an invitation to chaos" (Slingerland 2003a, 168). Not every action can be met with kindness and benevolence or kindness; the nobleman is not a doormat.[5]

More importantly, numerous passages indicate that it is part of the nobleman's refined sensibilities to hold certain individuals in contempt, owing to their petty or odious behavior. This is especially true when the nobleman thinks that ability to differentiate phony from authentic, vice from virtue.

> 子貢曰：「君子亦有惡乎？」子曰：「有惡。惡稱人之惡者，惡居下流而訕上者，惡勇而無禮者，惡果敢而窒者。」曰：「賜也亦有惡乎？」「惡徼以為知者，惡不 係以為勇者，惡訐以為直者。」
> 17.24 – Zigong asked, "Does the nobleman have contempt (*wu* 惡) too?" The Master replied, "He has contempt: contempt for those who pronounce the bad points of others; contempt for those who remain below while criticizing those above; contempt for those who are bold yet lack propriety; contempt for those who are plucky yet violent."
> The Master added, 'Do you, Zigong, have contempt as well?' Zigong said, '[Yes.] Contempt for those who take plagiarism for wisdom; contempt for those who take insolence for courage; contempt for those who take slander for uprightness.'

The more straightforward, literal reading of 4.3 gains further plausibility when considered in conjunction with a passage that appears shortly after it—4.6.

> 子曰：「我未見好仁者，惡不仁者。好仁者，無以尚之；惡不仁者，其為仁矣，不使不仁者加乎其身。」
> 4.6 - The Master said, "I have yet to see a person who loved *ren*, or one who despised (*wu* 惡) what was not *ren*. He who loved *ren* would esteem nothing above it. He who despised what is not *ren* would be *ren* himself; he would not allow anything that is not *ren* to be associated with his person.

There is some difficulty in parsing the phrase 其為仁矣. Nonetheless, despising what is not *ren* is here described as a key to being *ren* (or, minimally, to practicing *ren*). It can thus be understood as a disposition conducive to virtue. In 4.6, we also see some rationale for why contempt might be seen as a virtue. Contempt can keep influences that might interfere with one's becoming virtuous at bay. It seems well suited to this role.[6] Other passages recommend that one keep company with those who are morally laudable (e.g. 1.6, 1.13, 17.8), and avoid those who are wicked (e.g. 17.7).

The passages on contempt suggest that, on the plausible assumption that some persons truly are despicable (not exactly a leap of faith), failing to distinguish the despicable from the good would be a gross moral failure. Failing to sniff out a charlatan or scoundrel would mark a lack of wisdom or discernment. Being duped or victimized by such individuals would have its

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[5] My thanks to Stephen Wagner for helpful comments here.
[6] I will have more to say about this matter of motivation in the final section.

costs and, what's worse, were the virtuous individual to love indiscriminately—without consideration of the merits of those receiving esteem and affection—then he or she would be a poor role model for others, potentially leading them to harm or victimization by others. This is especially damning since the early Confucians both recognized and endorsed the sway that individuals had over others, especially over those who were younger, less experienced, or otherwise standing in need of guidance.

These do not exhaust the passages dealing with contempt in the *Analects*. Nonetheless, I want to draw the following tentative conclusion: the *Analects* recognizes that part of what it means to be a morally exemplary person is to feel and display genuinely negative, aversive feelings toward a range of appropriate targets. A properly cultivated individual will not only be *capable* of despising, but will also routinely despise. The nobleman will not, having cultivated himself according to the curriculum laid out by Kongzi and his followers, rid himself of such feelings. Instead, they remain part of his emotional repertoire, directed spontaneously at relevant targets. I believe this is the correct view, even though it runs against the dominant orthodox interpretation and might also not be particularly attractive to some contemporary readers.

II

So, just what sorts of persons are targeted for contempt in the text?[7] While the targets are variegated, one particular type invites the most scorn (and by a healthy margin). Kongzi and his students seemed to especially loathe the *glib*—that is, individuals who possessed eloquent charm and social sway, yet lacked substance and real commitment. Why is it that the voices in the *Analects* are so concerned with glibness and eloquence? Were there no other worthy targets of contempt and resentment?

> 16.4 – Kongzi said, "Beneficial friendships number three, and harmful friendships also number three. The straight, honorable, and learned—these are the beneficial friends. Flatterers, skilled gratifiers, and glib slicksters—these are the harmful friends."
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> 1.3 – The Master said, "Wily words and an ingratiating appearance—these are seldom indicative of humankindness (*ren* 仁)."[8]
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> 17.18 – The Master said, 'I despise (*wu* 惡) purple for displacing vermilion. I despise the tunes of Zheng for corrupting classical music. I despise clever talkers overturning states and noble families.'[9]

[7] Parts of the presentation here borrow from Sarkissian (20XX).

[8] Translating *ren* as 'humankindness' was first suggested to me by Richard Guisso. It captures both the connotation of being what exemplifies our species (humankind-ness) and also the sense of sympathetic concern for others (human-kindness).

[9] Bruce Brooks (personal communication) suggests that these passages come from the later stratum of the text, and might reflect a context wherein it was profitable to 'fake' the demeanor and bearing of the *ru*, hence the explicit

These and similar passages (e.g. 6.16, 11.25, 15.11) all target the same sort of individuals—those who use clever or wily words, put on airs, and otherwise ingratiate others. Why the derision of such individuals over others? Why do they occupy such a position of scorn in the text?

These passages are, manifestly, critical of superficiality and phoniness. By ingratiating themselves to others and observing contemporary conventions of propriety, glib or unscrupulous persons could attain some measure of social and political success. However, motivated solely by good reputation, high office, or general social approval, they lack deeper commitments. They need not be entirely malevolent. Instead, they are artful but insincere, fluent but without compassion, driven but without noble purpose. They seek conventional success and power. This is the most common way of understanding these passages (see, e.g., Schwartz 1985; Slingerland 2003a; 2003b; Van Norden 2007). Schwartz, for example, believes that the repeated attacks on clever talk and glibness stems from their power to conceal; they afford individuals "that fatal capacity for disguising real feelings and embellishing ulterior motives by the abuse of words" (Schwartz 1985, 93). Among Kongzi's laments in the *Analects* are some that look back to earlier periods where scholars "learned for themselves", improving their conduct to reflect higher ethical ideals, whereas in his own time they "learn for others", seeking approval and acceptance. Lacking a true commitment to a noble *dao*—such as the *dao* of the ancient sage kings and the waning Zhou dynasty—smooth-tongued elite would seek lower forms of gratification and success, chaining themselves to the material and instrumental.

This is surely part of the explanation, and there might also be a measure of sour grapes. Kongzi and his students were all ambitious individuals seeking positions of prominence and influence. They were in the business of reform and instruction. Naturally, one could imagine them resentful of others ascending to positions of prominence on the wings of superficial charm. Such individuals would be holding positions that should belong to those truly committed to restoring the world on its proper path—namely, those like Kongzi and his followers. I believe such a reading is not without its share of plausibility.

However, there is a lot more that we can say to explain why such individuals are singled out for contempt in the text. I don't believe this is simply a case of sour grapes, or of the Confucians disapproving of phony individuals. Rather, I believe these passages concerning contempt express a tacit and underlying fear of the risks attending those who follow Kongzi's *dao*, who try to live by his teachings and exemplify the qualities of his conception of the nobleman. Shakespeare once wrote that "In time we hate that which we often fear" (*Antony and Cleopatra*), and I believe the source of Kongzi's greatest scorn in the text stems from a fear of how his own students might turn out.

Why? To begin, it's worth repeating that one of the main goals of Kongzi and his students was to wield political influence and enact policies reflecting the merits of the former

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preoccupation with such phonies. As noted below and elsewhere (e.g. Sarkissian 2010 KOREAN), I believe they might also reflect internal worries of the school itself.

Zhou culture that was rapidly eroding away.[10] Without such power or influence, they had little hope of changing the trajectory of the world, of correcting its path. Given these goals, a nobleman's ability to hold sway over others—invariably, over others wielding actual political power—would be a powerful tool, causing them to bend or yield toward the right policy or course of action without feeling resentful or manipulated.

How to wield such influence or sway? Kongzi was aware that subtle situational variables could impact the trajectory of one's interactions with others. The signals a *ru* would give off in his presentation would therefore be crucial to his overall success. The wrong first moves could be disastrous. Those pursuing the Confucian *dao* thus sought mastery over subtle details of conduct, minding their impact on their audience and adjusting accordingly. It is abundantly clear in the *Analects* that Kongzi and his followers placed tremendous importance on minute matters of behavior such as one's posture, tone of voice, turns of phrase, and ceremonial garb. (In fact, the entirety of Book X of the *Analects* is devoted to detailed observations of Kongzi's overt behavioral mannerisms.)[11] The virtuous individual should be capable of triggering the right sequence of behaviors on any particular occasion by making the right 'first moves', broadly construed. This would include appealing to the right sorts of reasons and having the best of intentions, of course, but it also—and crucially—involved being attentive to the particulars of the situations at hand, and modifying one's expressions, comportment, and demeanor accordingly.

> 8.4 – There are three things in our *dao* that a gentleman values most: by altering his demeanor he avoids violence and arrogance; by rectifying his countenance he welcomes trustworthiness; through his words and tone of voice he avoids vulgarity and impropriety.
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> 15.6 – Zichan asked about getting by in the world. The Master said, "In speech, be dutiful and trustworthy. In your conduct, be sincere and respectful. In this way, you will always get by in the world, even if you find yourself in some barbarian state. If your words aren't dutiful and trustworthy, if your conduct isn't sincere and respectful, how can you possibly get along in the world, even in your own region? When standing, visualize these principles ahead of you…"
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> 20.2 – The nobleman straightens his robe and cap, assumes a solemn gaze, and appears so dignified that others looking upon him cannot help but be awe-struck.

Being authoritative or commanding required more than simply knowing the 'correct' moral principles or policies, or having a sincere commitment to instantiate the *dao* of the ancient sage kings. In addition, being authoritative or commanding meant paying attention to minor details

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[10] The translations of Brooks & Brooks (1998), Huang (1997), and, to a lesser extent, Slingerland (2003a) best convey these political aspects of the *Analects*.

[11] For an extended treatment of this idea, see Sarkissian (2010).

about one's presentation—one's appearance, one's style of speech and one's conduct—the very ways one's person might be interpreted or perceived by others. The nobleman changes in others by attending to aspects of his own comportment.

One way to think of Kongzi's preoccupation with such minor details of personal decorum can be understood through the notion of *self-fulfilling prophecies*. In any social exchange, even before words are exchanged, individuals signal various attitudes and even content-rich information about themselves (often surreptitiously) which then serve to make certain types of behavioral reactions in others more likely, either through triggering certain emotional reactions or systems of beliefs (also called *schemas*). Once such emotions or schemas are activated, they guide the processing of new information, influencing how they perceive and interpret later signals and cues (especially ambiguous ones), such that further behavior is interpreted in ways so as that conform to the initial impressions.[12] If first impressions are favorable, then subsequent behavior will also be interpreted along positive lines; if unfavorable, subsequent behavior will be interpreted along negative lines. The nobleman strives to control the triggers and prompts arising from his own person by carefully cultivating the details of his own bearing and decorum.

What were these minor details? How might one signal learning, cultivation, and moral authority? Much of Kongzi's curriculum was devoted to mastery of the minutia of ritual propriety and formal ceremony, memorization of classical poetry, music and literature, fluency in historical anecdotes, and a thoroughgoing devotion to the high culture of the waning Zhou dynasty. Mastery of these disciplines—representing the pinnacle of civilization—was paramount to attaining virtue. Indeed, lacking such mastery was considered tantamount to being useless (e.g. 17.10).

The ultimate goal of this curriculum was to cultivate one's character into something noble—to come to personify the excellence of the traditions virtuous exemplars. However, it is not difficult to see how doggedly pursuing these arts and mastering these skills can, in some instances and with some individuals, make the devotee one appear pedantic, narrow-minded, or arcane. And here is where the danger lies for those seeking the poise, erudition, and learning of a nobleman, the risks that attend those seeking authority, respect, and deference. Pursuing these goals requires constant self-scrutiny, minding one's appearance and bearing, one's attire and style, one's tone of voice and choice of elocutions. This sort of practice can lead one to become more obsessed with social standing and the esteem of others instead of faithful application to the values and ideals of the pinnacle of Zhou high culture.

Kongzi of course emphasized that one err on the side of modesty, humility, and restraint. Yet it takes no great stretch of the imagination to see how the preoccupations outlined above can lead one astray. Advanced practitioners, carried away by their own learning, virtuosity, and command of high culture, can become arrogant, self-obsessed, and—that most despised of qualities in the text—*glib*.[13] Kongzi voices such worries at places in the text.

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[12] In the psychological literature, the importance of 'first moves' or 'first impressions' is sometimes linked with the *perseverance effect*, whereby an initial belief endures in an agent despite subsequent evidence to the contrary, and the *halo effect*, a cognitive bias in which one's assessment of an individual along one axis (say, their appearance or their occupation) influence and bias other, unrelated assessments (such as their character or their intelligence).

[13] Indeed, this is how Kongzi is sometimes portrayed in the *Zhuangzi*.

3.18 – The Master said, “Those serving their lords with ritual propriety will be regarded as obsequious flatterers.”

5.22 – When the Master was in Chen, he said, “Oh, let’s go home! Let’s go home! Our young followers are wild and ambitious—they put on a great show of brilliant cultural achievement, but they lack the intelligence to prune and shape it.”

6.13 – The Master said to Zixia, “Be a nobleman *ru*. Don’t be a petty *ru*.”

In these passages we find Kongzi noting the danger attending those steeping themselves in the curriculum of the nobleman.W Indeed, we even see Kongzi himself accused of being glib by an otherwise unknown Weisheng Mou.

14.32 – Weishing Mou said to Kongzi, “Qiu[14]—what’s with all this flitting about? Is it not merely to show off your glibness?” Kongzi replied, “I would not dare deem myself glib; I’m just stubborn.”[15]

If the very practices of self-cultivation advocated by the *Analects* could lend themselves toward glibness, arrogance and putting on airs, then it should come as no surprise that these qualities are singled out among many others for denunciation in the text, why particular contempt is directed at them. Kongzi really despised this possibility. There is a thin line between being virtuous, learned, and conscientious on the one hand, and being preachy, pedantic, and priggish on the other. And nothing could jeopardize an upstart moral reformer’s path quite so readily as being preachy, pedantic and priggish.

5.5 – Someone said, “Zhonggong is humane (*ren* 仁) but not eloquent (*ning* 佞).” The Master said, “What need is there for ‘eloquence’? Respond with a clever tongue and you will frequently be resented. I don’t know of Zhonggong’s humaneness, but what need is there for ‘eloquence’?

There are few things in social life more noxious than someone putting on airs, elevating himself above others, or engaging in overt attempts to court favor by shows of erudition or sophistication.

Kongzi was, of course, against all this. His devotion to culture was motivated by its ability to cultivate and broaden one’s ethical imagination.

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[14] Note that “Qiu” was Kongzi’s personal name, so Weisheng Mou was either Kongzi’s elder by many years, or was being insulting.

[15] I must admit that Kongzi’s response has always seemed to me to be something of a non-sequitur. The most plausible interpretation is that Kongzi is conveying his stubborn devotion to the high culture of the Zhou dynasty.

8.8 – Be inspired by *The Odes*; establish yourself with *Ritual*; perfect yourself with *Music*.[16]

17.9 – The Master said, "Why is it none of you, my young friends, study the *Odes*? An apt quotation from the *Odes* may stimulate the imagination, endow one with breeding, enable one to live in communion with others and give expression to grievances."[17]

Yes, perhaps this is all true. But it may be equally likely that such shows of eloquence will be interpreted by others as showing off. In *Analects* 17.13 Kongzi slanders the 'village worthies' for wielding influence while lacking true virtue, and yet the village worthies *themselves* seem to have found Kongzi and his fellow *ru* to be pretentious and difficult, clinging to the ways of the past and preaching to others while refusing to conform to contemporary standards. This is expressed starkly in the *Mengzi*.

7B37 曰："'何以是嘐嘐也？言不顧行，行不顧言，則曰：古之人，古之人。行何為踽踽涼涼？生斯世也，為斯世也，善斯可矣。'閹然媚於世也者，是鄉原也。"
Mengzi replied, 'They are those who say, "Why are they [the *ru*] so magniloquent? Their words have not respect to their actions and their actions have not respect to their words, but they say, 'The ancients! The ancients!' Why do they act so peculiarly, and are so haughty and aloof? Born in this age, we should be of this age, to be good is all that is needed." Eunuch-like, flattering their generation – such are your village worthies.'

It may be that the very practices of self-cultivation valued by the *ru* risked leading at least some of them astray and garnering the resentment of others. If this is correct, then we have a nice coherence between the passages discussing contempt in general on the one hand, and these more specific passages concerning the targets of contempt on the other.

III

Thus far, I've tried to argue for two claims: first, that a disposition to despise is a feature of morally exemplary persons in the *Analects*, and second, that paying attention to the targets of contempt in the text can shed light on some problems that might arise for those pursuing Kongzi's *dao*.

Some may think that I have missed an important qualification: despising, as opposed to truly virtuous dispositions, has only instrumental value. Despising the non-*ren* may be valuable insofar as it might help one to become *ren* (4.6), but it is not as though despising itself has value. A person seeking to cultivate herself should have the wisdom to enter environments in which

[16] Most likely 詩, 禮, and 樂 refer to specific curricula or even particular books as opposed to mere general domains of life, hence the italics.

[17] These passages suggest that texts such as the *Odes* are now widely circulated and available to study, allowing educated individuals to engage with them by themselves. My thanks to Bruce Brooks for pointing this out.

her virtues might flourish as well as the wherewithal to avoid negative environments that might compromise her goals. Despising might help with the latter. So someone might cultivate contempt as a way of advancing along the moral path. However, this only speaks to how contempt may be beneficial or propitious in pursuing certain ends. At the end of the process, one might think that contempt will fall aside, since its instrumental role in incubating virtue would have been fulfilled. However, the most obvious response to such an objection is that despising is *not* presented as part of the psychology of the learner, or of an immature person on the path to virtue. Rather, it is presented as a feature of the nobleman, of someone who can already be called *ren*. One cannot say that contempt falls aside at the end of self-cultivation because the text clearly claims otherwise.

One might respond by claiming that the nobleman only outwardly despises because he is aware of the weighty influence he has on others. The virtuous nobleman does not really harbor contempt toward anyone, let alone ill-will. Instead (as suggested by some of the interpreters above) he feels disappointment or regret that certain individuals lack virtue or merit. However, the nobleman understands that he cannot express mere disappointment or regret without risking that others take a relaxed or otherwise inappropriately stern attitude toward these individuals. The nobleman needs to be concerned about signaling which individuals are worth emulating, and which not. Only through outwardly showing contempt can he ensure that certain individuals are not heeded or mimicked. In sum, a nobleman might think it important to *signal* such attitudes as contempt and scorn to both a) properly guide acolytes and b) set correct parameters for moral evaluation. So the nobleman may take up the *appearance* of contempt at appropriate times without, however, genuinely feeling it.

Such considerations may be adduced to save the orthodox interpretation championed by Y. Huang, Chan, and Tu above. However, they fail to persuade. To see why, let us keep two issues separate. The first concerns what reasons we might adduce *third-personally* to explain why contempt may, over the course of a person's life, be helpful in bringing about certain desirable effects—why we might think feeling contempt toward appropriate targets is a good thing for someone to have over the long haul, both for the person herself and for those she may influence. The second is a completely separate issue about whether any such third-personal reasons or explanations are available to the person feeling contempt, or play a role in her psychological economy.

Consider, for example, Robert Frank's influential account about the rationality of certain emotions in his *Passions within Reason* (1988). Frank argues that certain emotions serve to foster long-term benefits for a person by counteracting desires—even rational desires—for immediate gratification. Imagine a case where someone has treated you unjustly—say, by refusing to pay you for your services in spite of having promised to do so. Imagine that the services amount to a day's work. What do you do? One option would be to fight for what is rightly yours—in other words, fight for the day's pay you were promised. However, there are costs to pursuing such a strategy. Were the person willing to pay he or she would presumably have done so, and there are greater harms that might arise if the situation escalates, including further personal injury or harm. Such considerations might make it seem rational to give up your just deserts and move on; resources expended in pursuing personal justice of this kind might outweigh any short-term

benefits gained (namely, the pay you are due). Nonetheless, as Frank points out, *signaling* to others that one is willing to pursue justice, retribution, or other forms of redress—even in spite of considerable personal risk, cost, or injury—can lead to very beneficial consequences; plausibly, such behavior can discourage mistreatment by others. However—and crucially—reactive attitudes such as anger or indignation can only work if they are felt sincerely and genuinely from a first-person perspective. They cannot be adopted because of any cold calculations for long term benefits.

Contempt, I suggest, might admit to similar rationale. We might explain the utility of despising the despicable as having instrumental benefits such as distancing oneself from noxious influences and warning others to do the same. Similarly, we might say that it is important, over the long term, to despise the despicable lest one invite chaos or exploitation by others. This is, however, a *third-person* explanation, much like the one Frank proffers for reactive attitudes such as righteous anger. It arises from a taking a dispassionate, objective stance. It is highly unlikely and implausible that any person could, *first-personally*, reason in this fashion and then adopt or maintain contempt toward any particular person or group in the absence of genuinely and spontaneously feeling it. Such displays, resulting from cold calculation and not sincere emotional reaction, would come across as phony and be unlikely to succeed. Indeed, reasoning to the conclusion that it would be instrumentally beneficial to feel contempt would likely be self-undermining.

Frank himself maintains that we couldn't come to adopt the proper emotional attitudes at will solely for the benefits that they might provide. Such instrumental considerations would undermine the emotion's motivational power. Similarly, it seems difficult to imagine that, in the numerous passages surveyed above in the *Analects*, the nobleman is putting on a mere display. Instead, the more natural reading (the more genuine one, from a psychological perspective) is to read them as describing actual contempt, felt spontaneously and appropriately toward truly loathsome individuals.

IV

There is no great difficulty, then, in thinking that Kongzi sincerely maintained that moral exemplars would despise certain individuals and hold them in contempt. Yet it is important to bear in mind that even while Kongzi recognized the necessity (inevitability?) of coming to such negative assessments and despising or blaming others, he maintained that one should only do so with appropriate caution and due consideration.

> 子曰：「眾惡之，必察焉；眾好之，必察焉。」
> 15.28 – The Master said, "It doesn't matter if the multitude despises someone; you must still examine the person and judge for yourself. It doesn't matter if the multitude loves someone; you must still examine the person and judge for yourself."

子貢問曰：「鄉人皆好之，何如？」子曰：「未可也。」「鄉人皆惡之，何如？」子曰：「未可也。不如鄉人之善者好之，其不善者惡之。」
13.24 – Zigong asked, '"All in the village love him." What do you think of that?' The Master said, 'Not good enough.' '"All in the village despise (*wu* 惡) him." What do you think of that?' The Master said, 'Not good enough. Neither compares to "Those good in the village love him, those bad in the village despise (*wu* 惡) him."'

Indeed, unreflectively criticizing others is criticized at various points in the text.

> 12.21 – Attacking your own bad qualities, not those of others—is this not the way to redress badness?
>
> 14.29 – Zigong was given to criticizing others. The Master said [sarcastically], "How worthy he is! As for myself, I hardly devote enough time to this."
>
> 17.24 – Zigong asked, "Does the nobleman despise anyone?" The Master replied, "Yes. He despises those who pronounce the bad points of others."

Voicing criticisms and negative evaluations of others is routinely frowned upon, and associated with a lack of moral maturity. Besides reflecting a kind of moral hubris, focusing on others' bad qualities shields one from the more important task of self-scrutiny. Blaming others is easy; admitting one's own deficiencies is difficult. This finds poignant expression in Wu Kangzhai's commentary on 14.29: "if I focus my attention on criticizing others, then my efforts with regard to examining myself will be lax. One cannot but be on guard against this fault!" (Slingerland 2003a, 166).

In sum: I think the *Analects* is right to maintain that not only is contempt warranted on certain occasions, but it must also figure into the psychological economy of any sufficiently mature moral agent. Self-cultivation does not lead to it its destruction or mitigation. Indeed, it shouldn't. If one were truly incapable of despising those who bring about suffering, who cause grief, who harm others or disregard their interests, or who threaten disorder for selfish motives, we would be right to look at them askance. Such individuals would clearly lack something desirable from a moral perspective. So even while it might seem counterintuitive to think that a consummately humane individual, a virtuous role model, would be filled with contempt for some people or situations, the *Analects* does well to remind us of these issues and force us to think them through.[18]

[18] My thanks to audiences at the Columbia Neo-Confucian Seminar and the Midwest Conference on Chinese Thought for helpful discussion. In addition, I would like to thank Bruce Brooks, Justin Tiwald, Stephen Wagner, and an anonymous referee for many helpful comments and criticisms on a previous draft. The paper is much improved as a result, even while I was unable to address them all sufficiently.

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