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**Virtuous Contempt and the Ritual Community  
in Confucius and Xúnzǐ**

**Curie Virág  
University of Edinburgh**

## **Virtuous Contempt and the Ritual Community in Confucius and Xúnzǐ<sup>1</sup>**

In our politically volatile era, there has been a growing sense that contempt, particularly when it is directed towards persons, is pernicious in a way that is quite distinctive and extreme – worse, even, than mere hatred or anger. As Stephen Darwall’s article in this issue has well shown, much of the unfolding political drama in liberal democracies over the past decade – the rise of populism, the surge to the right, the polarized electorate – can be understood, to a remarkable extent, in terms of the vicissitudes of contempt. The mess that is our polarized, hostile and sometimes violent political climate is arguably the direct consequence of normalizing the open expression of such “nasty” emotions as contempt. No less problematic, meanwhile, are the ethical implications of contempt as an attitude for how we as individuals relate to one another. Many have argued, following Kant, that the hierarchizing quality of contempt makes it especially problematic among the “reactive attitudes” because it violates a basic standard of respect towards all human beings.<sup>2</sup> This entails regarding others not only as lesser, but also as categorically *other*: as Darwall (2018) has observed, building on work of P.F. Strawson (1963) and others, contempt, unlike blame but similar to pity, takes a third-person standpoint towards its objects and regards them not as individuals but as “characters and kinds” (Darwall 2018, 193). It thus marks a disengagement from the targets of one’s contempt such that one no longer regards

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Douglas Cairns for organizing the fascinating workshop that has led me to write this paper, as well as the workshop participants and audience members for their responses and questions to my presentation. I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their very thoughtful and incisive feedback on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> See Hill (2000) 59-118 for a modern case against contempt along these lines.

them from a second-person standpoint – that is, as “mutually accountable member[s] of the moral community (Darwall 2018, 208; Strawson 1968, 93).

Given its destructive impact and dehumanizing aspects, there is reason to be wary of contempt, and to ask whether it is ever justified<sup>3</sup> and whether we might not – as thinkers have been advocating for other potentially destructive emotions like anger<sup>4</sup> – try to control and restrain it. Among contemporary scholars, Michelle Mason (2003, 2018) and Macallister Bell (2005, 2013, 2018) have argued for recognizing a space of *apt* contempt, emphasizing that contempt is not only appropriate and morally justified in certain kinds of situations, but also practically efficacious, playing a constructive role in maintaining the bonds of the moral community. In the context of interpersonal relationships, Mason has argued that “properly focused contempt” is a morally justified attitude that can “play an essential role in holding ourselves and others accountable to moral norms.” (Mason 2018, xvi). Macalliser Bell, for her part, takes things further by arguing in favor of a full withdrawal of respect from the object of contempt, but in very specific kinds of situations. Addressing the broader social landscape, with its hierarchical structures, inequities and injustices, Bell emphasizes the distinction between upward and downward contempt and argues that contempt is an appropriate counter-response to the vice of superbia – that is, to forms of contempt displayed by such people as racist supremacists who categorically dismiss those they consider to be of lower standing to themselves. Bell observes that, since we are not on a level playing field when it comes to contempt, and those who are the targets of such superbia are often without status and institutionalized forms of power, it may well be that righteous contempt is the only available

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<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., De Sousa (2019).

<sup>4</sup> The debate over the ethics of anger commands a vast literature. Major recent publications include Nussbaum (2016), Srinivasan (2018) Cherry and Flanagan (2018), Callard (2020), Cherry (2021), and Flanagan (2021). For the Confucian tradition, see Lewis (2020).

response. In such situations, “upward” contempt that is directed towards unjust, illegitimate and exclusionary hierarchies can be justified even in its more robust form, serving as a powerful tool for redistributing moral status in a way that “reflects and expresses the fundamental equal moral worth of all persons” (Bell 2018, 10).

While we can acknowledge that the task of redressing the injustices of oppressive hierarchical structures, as outlined by Bell, is part of our collective responsibility, and that there may be scope for “focused contempt” in view of its potential efficacy to help right the wrongs of our unjust society (Darwall 2018), the question has been raised as to whether such an endeavor warrants the kind of “unfocused” contempt that involves the categorical withdrawal of recognition from the object of contempt, as well as the (corresponding) package of actions that Bell deems justified – such as mocking and ridicule, targeted personal denunciations, and frontal public attack – all of which are distinctively uncivil behaviors.<sup>5</sup> There are both practical and ethical concerns. At the practical level, there is the problem of adding more fuel to an already toxic and dangerous political landscape, where fighting contempt with contempt can lead to a spiraling of contempt and the normalization of a kind of no-holds-barred expression of rage and hate that has been destructive for our civil culture, and that has threatened the foundations of our modern liberal democratic order (Stohr 2017). At the ethical level, there remains the lingering question of whether it is ever justified to disregard what Darwall has argued is our basic obligation to address each other second-personally, as equal members of a moral community who are accountable to each other.

All of these issues raise a set of fundamental questions: What are the boundaries of apt and justified contempt? How can we leave open a space for apt contempt without contributing to

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<sup>5</sup> In this respect, the arguments that recent scholars have made in favor of good manners is directly relevant to the debates surrounding the ethics of contempt. See Stohr (2012) and Olberding (2019).

a breakdown of the attitudinal and behavioral norms that can keep civil society from disintegrating? On these issues, the rich documentation of contempt in premodern traditions has much to contribute, providing not only alternative approaches to the question of what to *do* about contempt, but also different conceptual and moral frameworks from which to examine what, in fact, contempt is. What is at least minimally clear from considering how contempt is addressed and narrativized in diverse premodern sources is that what falls under the rubric of contempt is an enormously complex package of attitudes and behaviors whose interrelationships demand further and more nuanced elaboration than contemporary debates in moral philosophy have allowed for thus far.

It is with a view to developing this space of inquiry that this paper sets out to reconstruct and examine the conception and role of contempt in the early Confucian ethical tradition. Focusing on the *Analects* of Confucius (Kǒng Qiū 孔丘 or Kǒngzǐ 孔子, trad. 551–479 BCE) and the *Xúnzǐ* (ascribed to Xúnzǐ 荀子, c. 310–210 BCE) – two of the most foundational texts of the early Chinese ethical tradition<sup>6</sup> – the paper takes as its starting point the fact that, in both texts, moral emotions like contempt are part of an integrated package in which feelings and attitudes achieve proper form through ritually appropriate speech and action. As the centerpiece of Confucian moral practice, ritual is the vehicle through which the values and norms of the community are negotiated and maintained. It will be shown that, in both the *Analects* and the *Xúnzǐ*, contempt, broadly speaking, was presented as an appropriate and justified response for a person of virtuous character, but also that there were significant differences between the two thinkers with respect to what they deemed contempt-worthy, the extent to which one was

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<sup>6</sup> The third being the *Mencius* (or the *Mengzi* 孟子), the eponymous text documenting the teachings and conversations of the influential latter-day follower of Confucius, Mengzi (372–289 BCE).

justified in displaying such contempt, and in which manner. More specifically, the paper argues that Xúnzǐ departed from his predecessor in his effort to set clear limits on what is acceptable in the enactment of one's contempt – a move that was clearly bound up with his distinct concern with the potential problems of disorder and violence. These differences provide important insights into how the boundaries of apt contempt – carefully delineated through ritually proper action – were calibrated in accordance with the shifting boundaries of the normative community.

Tracing the evolution of contempt from Confucius to Xúnzǐ affords a more expansive view of the possible forms that contempt can take, and the ways in which the later thinker, writing in a turbulent era of large-scale social and political realignments, sought to reconcile an appreciation for the naturalness and aptness of contempt without necessarily opening the Pandora's box containing the more "toxic" forms of contempt that exacerbate conflicts and give rise to violence. It also challenges the very notion of personhood that grounds contemporary discussions of the ethics of reactive attitudes like contempt, highlighting the extent to which persons are embedded in communities as defined by affective ties and realized through norms of ritualized social practice. These features of early Confucian approaches to contempt support the idea that contempt can be both natural and apt, but that the issue of what to do about contempt cannot be extracted out from the forms of social practice through which respect and recognition are learned and actualized in the first place.

## **Methodological Preliminaries**

Before proceeding, a brief methodological discussion is in order to explain what is meant by contempt in this paper and how I propose to address the topic of contempt in the context of early Confucian texts, given that we are working with an English term that does not map neatly onto classical Chinese terminology. As far as the term in English is concerned, I take it as a semantically expansive idea, covering affective states, judgments and attitudes, as well as actions (or refraining from action), united by the basic idea is that one is relating to another person in a way that takes them as inferior to oneself and thus of lesser worth. The *Oxford English Dictionary* conveys this range of meanings in its list of definitions of the term: “A feeling of dislike or hostility towards a person or thing one regards as inferior, worthless, or despicable;” “an attitude expressive of such a feeling”; “a complete lack of consideration or respect for a person or thing;” “An expression or display of hostility or lack of respect; an act prompted by scorn or disdain.”<sup>7</sup> Whether the emphasis is on the attitude or on more externally manifest behaviors, it is the downward-looking relationality that I take to be the crucial component of contempt in this paper.

Although contempt is not much thematized in early Confucian texts – there is no obvious term, corresponding to the English word “contempt,” that was a subject of an explicit and sustained discourse – this does not mean that the phenomenon of contempt was absent or unimportant. Indeed, given the hierarchical structure of early Chinese society, and the central concern of early Confucians to affirm an alternative hierarchical system based on their own ethically-oriented norms of proper attitude and conduct, it is hard to imagine that contempt would not have been a widespread phenomenon. And if there is no sustained thematization of contempt, the clash of competing systems of hierarchies – and the place of the producers of

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<sup>7</sup> “Contempt, n.” Retrieved from *OED Online*. <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/view/Entry/40121?rskey=40tccg&result=1>.



written forms of knowledge in the midst of these systems – meant that there was significant discussion and passing of judgment concerning those who merited high regard and those who were deserving of contempt.

These discussions, however, do not proceed through a single Chinese term that we can take as synonymous with “contempt.” Instead, what we might recognize as contempt is distributed over a number of terms, each of which might capture some aspects of what we today would associate with contempt, but not others. Moreover, we can also find relevant discussions in narratives of paradigm scenarios of contempt, where we might not necessarily find reference to a specific term that could be taken as contempt, but that describes situations where contempt is clearly involved. In short, then, to properly study the phenomenon of contempt in the context of the early Confucian tradition, we must be ready to consider both a *range* of terms, as well as a variety of sources that approach the conceptual field of contempt through different genres and modes of discourse.

This paper will accordingly address the topic of contempt in the early Confucian context not by tracing the vicissitudes of a single term of contempt, but by considering a range of terms that cover situations involving assertions of justified contempt. It does not aim to present a comprehensive study of all the relevant terms in the *Analects* and the *Xúnzǐ* but will focus on a number of key terms that reveal significant features of early Confucian attitudes towards contempt and of their evolution. The main term of interest in this study is *wù* 惡, which is typically translated as “hate” and which I argue can be taken as “to have contempt for” in many instances, given that the context in which the term is often used implies a particular form of ill feeling towards others that involves looking down on them as persons of lesser worth. In these cases, taking *wu* as contempt rather than as hate is preferable, since it conveys the fact that the

feeling is not simply a matter of dislike, on the basis of unnamed preferences, but is specifically about considering someone as being of lesser moral standing, and thus worthy of disapproval. *Wu* deserves particular attention both because it is the most important and prevalent among the possible terms meaning contempt in the *Analects*, and also because it is also a term that is used in the *Xúnzǐ*. It thus allows us to gauge the contours of contempt most effectively in the *Analects* and to identify important differences in the use of the term between Confucius and Xúnzǐ.

Apart from *wù*, there are a number of other relevant terms that might be included within the semantic range of contempt. Among those that appear in both texts are *wū* 侮, “to insult” or “treat with disrespect,” which focuses more on contemptuous behaviors rather than attitudes, and *xiǎorén* 小人, literally meaning a “small” or “petty” person but which is a common designation for a person of vile or unworthy character, and which thus implies an attitude of contempt towards the person who is so identified. In the *Xúnzǐ*, one finds a more elaborate vocabulary of contempt, in keeping with that text’s presentation of a more explicitly hierarchical vision of society. This includes the term *chǒu* 醜, meaning “repugnant,” “loathsome,” or “disgraceful,” and which also designates something as worthy of contempt or disdain. Even more significant is the term *jiàn* 賤, meaning “to consider as lowly,” which is often contrasted with *guì* 貴, or “to honor.” These two terms form an important pairing in Xúnzǐ, with his particular attention to clearly delineated status distinctions, and to the attitudes that are appropriate to these differentiations. The term *jiàn* appears in the *Analects* as well but, significantly, refers to a mean condition and does not have the meaning of contempt.

And finally, it is important to include those discussions that do not necessarily involve a particular term of contempt but that clearly involve situations of contempt. These often provide important insight into the structural contexts in which contempt arises and thus affords us with a

more expansive view of the kinds of dynamics and interactions that are involved in discussions of contempt in early sources, where ethical ideas are often explored through narratives rather than through theoretical exposition. This paper will examine a few such instances: passage 17.21 of the *Analects*, which involves the exchange between Confucius and his disciple Zǎi Wǒ about the performance of the mourning rites towards one's parents; and various passages in the *Xúnzǐ* which include Xúnzǐ's expressions of contempt towards people whose conduct he finds reprehensible, and thus deserving of lower moral regard.

### **Contempt and the Affective Community in the *Analects* of Confucius**

What we know about Confucius' teachings is collected in a text called the *Analects* (*Lúnyǔ* 論語), which was composed over centuries by generations of his disciples. Collectively, the various layers of this text present us with a fairly consistent, if complex, vision of the exemplary life and what it entails. While much of what we can construct of Confucius' moral vision come from discussions about what he loved, esteemed, and delighted in, equally revealing are those passages concerning what he disliked, disvalued, and – even – what he had contempt for. In the *Analects*, the Master is recorded as actively expressing contempt for others, and identifying the very capacity for contempt as a marker of the virtuous person, typically referred to as the person of humaneness (*rén* 仁) or the *jūnzǐ* 君子 (“the exemplary person,” “the gentleman”). And, in general, contempt seems to serve the rather specific purpose of delineating and clarifying the kind of ethical posture and norms of feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and actions that Confucius regarded as proper for those committed to living a life of virtue.

The topic of contempt has received scant attention in the scholarly literature. Thus far, there is a single study in English explicitly dedicated to the topic in the early Confucian tradition: Hagop Sarkissian’s forthcoming article, “Virtuous Contempt in the *Analects*.”<sup>8</sup> Sarkissian’s study focuses on the term *wù* 惡, which is usually translated as “to hate” or “to dislike” in the context of Confucian writings but which Sarkissian argues persuasively should be properly taken as “contempt” when used as a noun, and “to despise” or “have contempt for” when used as a verb. The case is presented in an extended analysis of the following key passage:

The Master said, “Only (*weí* 唯) the humane (*rén zhe* 仁者) can love (*hǎo* 好) people, and despise (*wù* 惡) them” (*Analects* 4.3; *ICS Lúnyǔ* 4.3/7/9).<sup>9</sup>

The use of the term *wù* in this passage has led to considerable maneuvering among modern commentators, who have found it rather unsettling to confront the possibility that Confucius condoned the idea that a human person could actually hate or despise anyone. Thus, Tu Weiming (1981), Yong Huang (2005) and others have sought to blunt the edge of these statements by drawing a distinction between “despising someone” and “despising them with malice,” or by proposing that the hate is directed not towards persons but towards “concrete situations” (Sarkissian, forthcoming, 3).

But, as Sarkissian plausibly observes, at least in the context of *Analects* 4.3, we really are talking about contempt here, and moreover, this contempt is clearly being directed at people. The

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<sup>8</sup> This discussion is based on the latest available pre-publication version of this paper last accessed from PhilPapers (philpapers.org) on 19 August 2022.

<sup>9</sup> References to the source text refer to the volume, page and line numbers in Lau, Wah, and Ching (Eds.). (1995). Here and henceforth cited as *ICS Lúnyǔ*. The *Analects* passages cited in the context of Sarkissian’s discussion is that given in Sarkissian’s paper.

case seems fairly straightforward because the passage does not make sense as simple statement about loving and hating people. This is because of the use of the term *wéi* 唯, which means “only:” “*Only* the humane can love people and despise them,” the passage reads (Sarkissian, forthcoming, 2; my italics). This suggests that Confucius is not just talking about loving and hating people, which presumably anyone can do, but rather about the way in which the person of exemplary virtue loves and hates. In other words, what we are dealing with is loving appropriately and in the right way and hating appropriately and in the right way. There is clearly a judgment being made about the qualities of the target to which one is directing one’s feelings and attitude, and the aptness of the evaluation. There is a hierarchy built into these evaluations, and so the point seems to be that the humane person has contempt for things that are deemed worthy of contempt and love for those worthy of love. The passage states that the very capacity to love and despise appropriately is a characteristic feature of one who is humane, or *rén*, which for Confucius, is the highest of all human virtues and the endpoint of self-cultivation. And insofar as it describes the appropriate response of an exemplary person, it is meant to signal an apt evaluative response to one who is deemed base and unworthy of one’s regard.

Moving beyond Sarkissian’s discussion of *wù*, it is relevant to consider two basic normative criteria in Confucius’ ethical vision, which are arguably significant for understanding the contours of contempt in the *Analects*. The first is the importance of knowing others (*zhī rén* 知人), which for Confucius involved having sound judgment of others and being able to properly evaluate them. The importance of this capacity is such that Confucius made it an attribute of humaneness itself, as we observe in the following exchange with his disciple Fán Chí:

Fán Chí asked about humaneness (*rén* 仁). The Master replied, “It is to love others (*ài rén* 愛人).” He asked about knowledge (*zhī* 知). The master replied, “It is to know others (*zhī rén* 知人).” (*Analects* 12.22; *ICS Lúnyǔ* 12.22/33/5-7).

The other normative criterion is emotional authenticity.<sup>10</sup> This criterion runs through Confucius’ numerous discussions of the properly realized individual in the *Analects*. Confucius emphasized that those rare individuals who possessed the virtue of humaneness did not simply practice correct conduct, but fully backed up their commitments with the full force of their emotions, thereby embodying their total devotion to the proper things in life. More specifically, he noted that those of genuine virtue appreciated and took pleasure in what was truly good – that is, in living a virtuous life of learning and right conduct. This criterion of emotional authenticity was, for Confucius, the benchmark that distinguished those of highest virtue – those of humaneness – from those who merely acted in accordance with duty.<sup>11</sup> Authenticity was thus foundational to his hierarchy of virtue. As Confucius lays out in the following passage:

The Master said, “One who knows (*zhī* 知) it is not the equal of one who loves (*hǎo* 好) it and one who loves it is not the equal of one who delights/takes pleasure (*lè* 樂) in it” (*Analects* 6.20; *ICS Lúnyǔ* 6.20/13/25).

This ideal of authenticity, I argue, has direct implications for contempt as well. First, it suggests that there is something like *proper* contempt for Confucius, and that such contempt is

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<sup>10</sup> This is an issue that receives extensive treatment in my chapter on the *Analects* in Virág (2017) 26-50.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., *Analects* 5.19 and the discussion in Virág (2017, 43-45).

emotionally charged, involving genuine feelings that back up one's negative evaluation. Second, it is also a determining factor when it comes to *whom* Confucius takes to be the proper targets of contempt. It is precisely those who fail to be authentic – those who do not feel as they should – who are deserving of contempt. A natural place to begin our search would be to consider those passages in which *wù* is invoked as an appropriate attitude of the exemplary person. For instance:

Zǐ Gòng asked, “Does the gentleman (*jūnzǐ* 君子) have contempt (*wù* 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.” (*Analects* 17.24; *ICS Lúnyǔ* 17.24/50/19-20; with minor modifications from Sarkissian's version)

This is a fairly specific list, and the items on this list give a good sense of Confucius' criteria of right conduct and properly cultivated dispositions. On the basis of this and other passages, Sarkissian concludes that a recurring target of Confucius' ire is those who have mastered the techniques of ritual conduct but who did so in a pedantic, narrow-minded way: those who are guilty of “glibness, arrogance and putting on airs” (Sarkissian, forthcoming, 11).

Arguably, however, there are other targets as well. As I propose here, Confucius reserves a more deep-seated contempt for another group: those among his own disciples to whom he has devoted years of his life to educating, and who, despite all his efforts, betray his vision. These are the ambitious and career-oriented among his disciples who have, in his view, sold out. Such

disciples are the objects of not just severe annoyance, but of contempt that is tantamount to a kind of moral outrage. Passages documenting such contempt do not use the term *wù* but it is clear from their narrative structure that we are, in fact, dealing with paradigm scenarios of contempt, where intense feelings of disdain derive from a sense that the objects of one's contempt are guilty of a fundamental moral transgression – what, for Confucius, amounts to a ritual violation of the highest order.

The most telling example of this is a passage about the rite of mourning for one's parents – the most important of all ritual practices, and which, according to the received prescriptions, is supposed to last for three years. The passage in question occurs in Chapter 17 and involves an exchange between Confucius and his disciple Zǎi Wǒ, with some unnamed disciples in attendance:

Zǎi Wǒ asked about the three-year mourning period, saying, “Surely one year is long enough. If the gentleman refrains from practicing ritual for three years, the rites will surely fall into ruin; if he refrains from music for three years, this will surely be disastrous for music. After the lapse of a year the old grain has been used up, while the new grain has ripened, and the four different types of tinder have all been drilled in order to rekindle the fire. One year is surely long enough.”

The Master asked, “Would you feel comfortable (*ān* 安) then eating your sweet rice and wearing your brocade gowns?”

“I would.”



The Master replied, “Well, if you would feel comfortable doing so, then by all means you should do it. When the gentleman is in mourning, he gets no pleasure (*bù gān* 不甘) from eating sweet foods, finds no joy (*bù lè* 不樂) in listening to music, and feels no comfort (*bù ān* 不安) in his place of dwelling. This is why he gives up these things. But if you would feel comfortable doing them, then by all means you should!”

After Zǎi Wǒ left, the Master remarked, “This shows how lacking in humaneness (*bù rén* 不仁) this Zǎi Wǒ is! A child is completely dependent upon the care of his parents for the first three years of his life – this is why the three-year mourning period is the common practice throughout the world. Did Zǎi Wǒ not receive three years of loving care from his parents?” (*Analects* 17.21; *ICS Lúnyǔ* 17.21/50/1-12; Slingerland trans., 2003, 209-210).

Confucius’ condemnation of Zǎi Wǒ as *bù rén* – lacking in humaneness – signals his judgment that his disciple fails to recognize the most basic obligation that a child owes to his parents and is thus no longer deserving of moral worth. Since those who have grown to adulthood have all received three years of selfless devotion and care from their parents during their infancy and early childhood, it is only right, Confucius insists, that they give back “three years of loving care.” This is why it is proper to mourn for three years. In denying this, Zǎi Wǒ becomes an appropriate target of contempt: in pronouncing Zǎi Wǒ to be lacking in humaneness, Confucius

effectively defines him outside of the sphere of the moral community that he has devoted his life to fostering, and declares him to be unworthy of moral regard.

Given Confucius' criterion of emotional authenticity, mentioned above, Zǎi Wǒ has committed a double violation – one that suggests that the performance and the attitude of contempt cannot be extricated from one another. In the first instance, it involves a failure to recognize the importance of carrying out the traditional three-year mourning rites – something that Confucius deems to be a non-negotiable obligation that all people owe to their parents to properly express their love and gratitude. But Zǎi Wǒ's negligence also involves his failure to *feel* in the right way. We know this not only because Zǎi Wǒ's denial of the importance of properly performing the mourning rites towards one's parents shows that he does not feel the proper love and gratitude towards his parents, but also because it is determined that he could actually take pleasure in material comforts only one year after burying his parents. This is what we learn from his response to Confucius' query, “Would you feel comfortable (*ān* 安) then eating your sweet rice and wearing your brocade gowns?” Once Zǎi Wǒ responds in the affirmative, it becomes clear that Zǎi Wǒ's transgression is total. It is not just a matter of a mistaken judgment about how to conduct himself. Zǎi Wǒ's heart is in the wrong place.

The reasons that Zǎi Wǒ brings up against to the norms of traditional mourning rites suggests that his questioning of the need to carry out the prescribed ritual prescriptions is not just about his readiness to slack off on his duties to his parents – at least not on his own admission. Instead, it is about a choice he is making about where his allegiance lies. According to Zǎi Wǒ, there is a choice to be made between performing ritual propriety towards his parents, on the one hand, and upholding the very institutions of ritual and music, on the other. If everyone were to drop out of society for three years to perform the traditional rites of mourning when a parent

died, Zǎi Wǒ points out, ritual itself would fall apart. Music would fall apart. There would be no crops. Civilization itself would fall apart. In thinking that one year is plenty of time to mourn one's parents, Zǎi Wǒ signals the prioritization of the larger society to which he belongs. This is the world of the future, in fact, a world in which we owe allegiance to the larger, impersonal community. It is a world that Confucius resists, and so he responds with contempt.

This passage in the *Analects* speaks directly to the concerns raised by Michelle Mason (2018) in her account of contempt as situated at “the limits of reactivity.” Here, Mason explains how contempt “may originate in circumstances of increasing doubt that the target is likely to change or reform.” It is what she calls a “last call” for recognition before the person is “remove[d] from the circle of persons with whom she reactively engages” (Mason 2018, 184). At this point one's contempt turns into the kind of Strawsonian “objective contempt” that sits on the other side of the “accountability divide.” Confucius' contempt seems to be hovering precisely at this boundary. His denunciation of Zǎi Wǒ as *bù rén*, lacking in humaneness, comes as a final warning shot before he writes him off. When Confucius tells him, “Well, if you would feel comfortable doing so, then by all means you should!” he signals that he no longer regards Zǎi Wǒ as part of the community that is united in their dedication to ritual as Confucius conceives of it.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Analects* 5.10 relates another incident in which Confucius expresses his contemptuous attitude towards Zǎi Wǒ:

Zǎi Wǒ was sleeping during the daytime. The Master said, “Rotten wood cannot be carved, and a wall of dung cannot be plastered. As for Zǎi Wǒ, what would be the use of reprimanding him?” The Master added, “At first, when evaluating people, I would listen to their words and then simply trust that the corresponding conduct would follow. Now when I evaluate people I listen to their words but then closely observe their conduct. It is my experience with Zǎi Wǒ that has brought about this change.” (*ICS Lúnyǔ* 5.10/10/1-3; Slingerland trans., 2003, 43).

Confucius' use of the analogy of rotten wood reinforces the sense that his dismissal of Zǎi Wǒ is categorical, premised on his assessment of him as an inferior grade of human being. This passage, however, is in tension with the Confucian vision of the human person as consisting of both a biologically shared substance (*zhì* 質) and “patterning” (*wén* 文), outlined below. This tension is not resolved in the text.

Confucius' contempt for, and apparent dismissal of, Zǎi Wǒ, arising in the context of an egregious ritual violation on the part of the latter, is as much affective and attitudinal as it is performative. From a modern standpoint, one might well wonder whether Confucius, in writing off his former disciple, exhibits a full-scale, unfocused contempt that violates the obligation to treat persons as persons, from a second-personal standpoint. There are, however, some mitigating factors to consider when we assess whether or not his contempt is justifiable from our point of view. First, there is the question of what, in fact, a person is. Arguably, the very conception of personhood in Confucius is one that differs fundamentally from the modern notions that are at play in contemporary discussions of reactive attitudes. Confucius' contempt is directed at Zǎi Wǒ, but who, or what, is Zǎi Wǒ? If we consider, following Confucius, that a person is a package of achievement that involves both a biologically shared substance (*zhì* 質) well as of "patterning" (*wén* 文), and that it is by cultivating and enacting patterned conduct through ritual, decorum and right practice that one is truly human in a normative sense,<sup>13</sup> then what would it mean to say that contempt is directed towards persons? This conceptual context necessarily blunts the edge of the

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<sup>13</sup> Confucius famously refrained from talking about human nature (*xìng* 性) (*Analects* 5.13) – a topic about which thinkers of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE, including Xúnzǐ, were caught up in a very contentious debate. On the rare occasion that he did, it was to underscore the fact that while people similar to one another when it came to their inborn nature (*xìng* 性), they were quite different when it came to their habits, customs and practices (*xí* 習) (*Analects* 17.2). An exchange between two of Confucius' disciples lays it out in more theoretical terms, by way of a distinction between substance (*zhì* 質) and ornament (*wén* 文).

Jí Zichéng said, "In a superior man it is only the substantial qualities (*zhì* 質) which are wanted; why should we seek for ornamental accomplishments (*wén* 文)?"

Zi Gòng said, "Alas! Your words, sir, show you to be a superior man, but four horses cannot overtake the tongue. Ornament is as substance; substance is as ornament. The hide of a tiger or a leopard stripped of its hair, is like the hide of a dog or a goat stripped of its hair" (*Analects* 12.8; *ICS Lúnyǔ* 12.8/31/19-20).

Though put in rather extreme terms, Zi Gòng's insistence that ornament, or *wén*, is what makes a person, accords with Confucius' emphasis on cultivation and practice as what comprises the full package of a person.

particular vileness that we associate with contempt as a refusal to recognize the humanity of another person. For Confucius, the key question is not what it is to be human, as defined by some kind of essential core shared by all human beings and that claims fundamental worth and dignity, but rather how one *becomes* fully human. This is to be achieved through learning, self-cultivation and the practice of right action, and it is to the extent that one embodies and enacts such learning, cultivation and action that one fulfills one's humanness and can claim the recognition and respect of others. This is what it is to be a person of *rén*, of humaneness.

Another mitigating factor has to do with the eliciting conditions of Confucius' contempt which, to invoke Macallister Bell's criteria, moves both upward and downward. While Confucius, as the teacher and as the head of the community of the disciples he has gathered around him, speaks from a position of superiority vis-à-vis his disciple Zǎi Wǒ, he is also someone who is powerless and occupies low status as a teacher, with no official position to speak of. The moral and ritual order that Confucius defends is, by the standards of his own world, on the wrong side of history. In a world where it is not learning (*xué* 學) for its own sake, but for the sake of gaining office, wealth, social status and power, that is met with tangible rewards, Confucius' insistence that ritual be about our primary obligations to our affective community – our parents, our siblings, our children, our friends, our circle of intimates – represents a way of life that is being regarded with contempt – apparently even by those in his own inner circle. Confucius' contempt for Zǎi Wǒ, then, is not just about Zǎi Wǒ's personal failure to abide by the moral standards upheld by his teacher. Situated at the boundary between the old order that Confucius wants to protect and the new order that is coming, it is a contempt that is directed at the very contemptuous instrumentalization of learning and ritual practice that is

being shamefully exhibited by the likes of Zǎi Wǒ, who have chosen to pursue their ambitions by pledging their allegiance to the impersonal order of the state.

### **Contempt and the Universal Community in the *Xúnzǐ***

The world that lay on the other side of Confucius' reactive attitude of contempt, as it were – the world of the impersonal community– is the one that Xúnzǐ was concerned with. A latter-day follower of Confucius, Xúnzǐ was a systematic thinker who lived in an era of intellectual ferment, when scholars wrote treatises and debated with one another on ethical and political questions using a sophisticated conceptual vocabulary that reflected an emergent concern with theorizing about the workings of the natural world, the social and political order, and the human being. This vocabulary included such terms as *xīn* 心 (heart/mind), *qíng* 情 (emotions, affections, innate dispositions) and *xìng* 性 (inborn nature), which Xúnzǐ took up at length as he expanded upon the topics of ritual, virtue and self-cultivation that comprised the heart of Confucius' ethical vision. Xúnzǐ's approach to these topics was informed by the fact that he was part of the political establishment in a way that Confucius was not, and was thus directly concerned with matters of statecraft and governance. Thus, rather than recognizing, as Confucius had, a necessary choice between allegiance to one's affective community, on the one hand, and allegiance to the impersonal social order of the state, on the other, Xúnzǐ took for granted that these interests could all be reconciled and harmonized. Thus, while Confucius recognized a fundamental tension between living properly and serving the state, and did not pay much attention to how such tensions might be balanced within a vision of the properly governed state,

it was precisely on the issue of how to pull off this balancing act that Xúnzǐ concerned himself with in his own writings.

Framed within such priorities, then, Xúnzǐ's approach to reactive attitudes such as contempt was oriented towards reconciling what he regarded as proper in the sense of what was natural to our human condition, with what was proper from a more practical social and political standpoint. Like Confucius, Xúnzǐ recognized that it was natural to respond emotionally to things, and to react negatively in certain situations. For instance, when one's honor was violated, it was only right to feel insulted and to respond with anger. He thus firmly pushed back against Sòngzǐ's 宋子 insistence that "it is not disgraceful to be insulted," (*jiàn wǔ bù rǔ* 見侮不辱) and that therefore one should simply be impassive in such situations. For Xúnzǐ, to fail to respond would be to lack a sense of "honor" (*róng* 榮) and "disgrace" (*rǔ* 辱), or right and wrong.<sup>14</sup> This position was in line with Xúnzǐ's more general emphasis on taking human emotional inclinations into account in his practical guidelines for ordering moral and social life. On the other hand, Xúnzǐ's claims as to the legitimacy of responding emotionally to one's circumstances pertained specifically to the responses of the virtuous person, which were presumably always appropriate. To translate this criteria into right practice, then, required clear delineation, both in terms of the targets of one's attitudes, as well as of the kind of behavior one engaged in to express these attitudes.

Such priorities play out in Xúnzǐ's account of contempt. Like Confucius, Xúnzǐ assumed that contempt towards those deemed morally base was fully justified, and that the very capacity for such contempt was one of the markers of a person of virtue. In several chapters of the *Xúnzǐ*,

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<sup>14</sup> Translations cited from *Xúnzǐ* follow those in Hutton, with occasional modification. References to the source text refer to the volume, page and line numbers in Xúnzǐ (1950), here and henceforth cited as *HYXY*. These passages refer to *Xúnzǐ* Ch. 18, *HYXY* 69/18/102-70/18/114. For fuller discussion of this and related passages in relation to the status of moral emotions in the *Xúnzǐ*, see Virág (2017) 163-188.

he expresses his own contempt and hostility towards those whose moral failings he seeks to call out and place within a clearly-defined hierarchy of values and behaviors. At the same time, he makes clear that in no circumstances can one tolerate socially disruptive, aggressive behavior that leads to divisions and conflict. Addressing these potential dangers, Xúnzǐ pays particular attention to outlining how contempt might still work within the boundaries of correct and acceptable forms of social interaction, in a way that does not lead to conflict and violence.

One way in which he does this is by removing the affective charge of contempt. Consider the following passage describing the attitudes with which a person of *rén* confronts those who are worthy and unworthy:

To honor (*guì* 貴) those who are worthy is humane (*rén* 仁). To consider as lowly (*jiàn* 賤) those who are unworthy is also humane” (*Xúnzǐ* Ch. 6. *HYXY* 16/6/21).

Now, compare this with Confucius’ terminology of loving and despising, in the passage we have examined at length above:

The Master said, “Only the humane can love (*hao* 好) people, and despise (*wù* 惡) them (*Analects* 4.3; *ICS Lúnyǔ* 4.3/7/9).

In Xúnzǐ’s version, the language of preference has been replaced with that of appraisal. Evaluation is built into both statements, but Xúnzǐ’s version involves more explicitly hierarchical attitudes of “honoring” and “considering as lowly.” It also straightforwardly correlates these attitudes with the attributes of the individuals that are being appraised. The humane person no



longer loves and despises people (however appropriately) but rather – and presumably in a more objective state of mind – honors those who are worthy and treats as lowly those who are unworthy.

Xúnzǐ does, in fact, use the term *wù* 惡, to despise, but not very frequently. One passage where it appears is the following, where he speaks of the gentleman, or the *jūnzǐ*, as having contempt for those who act villainously:

And so, he who rightly criticizes me acts as a teacher toward me, and he who rightly supports me acts as a friend toward me, while he who flatters and toadies to me acts as a villain toward me. Therefore the gentleman exalts those who act as teachers toward him and becomes close to those who act as friends toward him, so as to utterly despise those who act as villains toward him (*wù qí zéi* 惡其賊)” (*Xúnzǐ* Ch. 2; *HYXY* 3/2/3).

This passage is interesting because it does not license contempt towards people as a general proposition, but instead specifies that this contempt is about despising people who act despicably. The targets of this contempt are thus the agents of villainous actions, and to this extent is directed more towards behaviors than towards persons as such. This raises fewer questions about whether or not, from the standpoint of our modern ethical sensibilities, such contempt might be apt and justified, and about the potentially dehumanizing quality of unfocused contempt. In specifying the targets of apt contempt in this way, Xúnzǐ seems to be shifting the terms of the discussion away from Confucius’ seemingly unfocused contempt to a more focused conception.

In other passages regarding the contempt of the exemplary person, Xúnzǐ makes a point of specifying that the objects of this contempt are not persons, but the bad things themselves. As for loving others – the other capacity of those who possess the virtue of humaneness – Xúnzǐ does not follow Confucius in his insistence that it be *appropriately* directed, with its implication that it should be conferred on those who are worthy of such love. Instead, the person of *rén* should love others in general, very much echoing Mòzǐ’s 墨子 (Mò Dí 墨翟, c. 480–390 BCE) injunction to exercise impartial love or caring (*jiān ài* 兼愛). In an exchange with an interlocutor, Chén Xiāo 陳囂, Xúnzǐ expresses both his universal injunction to love others as well as the idea that such love is compatible with the use of military force. The exchange begins with Chén Xiāo asking Xúnzǐ how it could be that a person of *rén* would support using military force in the name of maintaining order in society:

Chén Xiāo asked Xúnzǐ, “When debating military affairs, you, sir, always take *rén* (humaneness/benevolence) and *yì* 義 (rightness) as what is fundamental. One who is *rén* loves others, and one who is *yì* 義 (righteous) follows good order. If this is so, then what use does one have for military forces? The reason why one has military forces is for struggle and contention.

Xúnzǐ said, “Things are not as you understand. The person of *rén* indeed loves others (*ài rén* 愛人), but it is because he loves others that he hates (*wù* 惡) for people to harm them. The person of *yì* indeed follows good order, but it is because he follows good order that he hates for people to throw it into chaos. Indeed, military forces are that by which one prohibits violence and does away with what is harmful. They are not for

struggle and contention (*fēi zhēng dúo yě* 非爭奪也) (*Xúnzǐ* Ch. 15. *HYXY* 56/15/66-69).

In characterizing the person of *rén* as one who loves others, *Xúnzǐ* further detaches contempt from the ordinary profile of the exemplary person – at least contempt that is directed towards persons. This, I have been proposing, has to do with *Xúnzǐ*'s more basic concern with eradicating conflict and fostering a more peaceful and harmonious social order. We see this concern in the numerous passages where *Xúnzǐ* vents about the qualities of people – characterized generically – whom he finds deserving of contempt and are thus objectively worthy of contempt. *Xúnzǐ*'s list of despicable qualities is very long but clearly and precisely target attributes and behaviors that undermine social harmony and civil interaction. In Chapter 3, “Nothing Improper” (*bù gǒu* 不苟), *Xúnzǐ* presents these anti-social tendencies as attributes of a blanket category of the “petty person” (*xiǎo rén* 小人) – the foil of the exemplary person (*jūnzǐ*), who is notable for his pro-social demeanor and conduct:

If the gentleman is talented, he is likeable, and if he is untalented, he is still likeable. If the petty man is talented, he is repulsive (*chǒu* 醜), and if he is untalented, he is still repulsive. If the gentleman is talented, then with broad-minded patience and easygoing uprightness he educates and guides other people. If he is untalented, then with respect and modesty he carefully serves other people. If the gentleman is talented, then with broad-minded patience (*kuān róng* 寬容) and easygoing uprightness (*yì zhí* 易直) he educates and guides other people. If he is untalented, then with respect (*gōng jìng* 恭敬) and modesty (*zūn chù* 尊綏) he carefully serves other people. If the petty man is

talented, then with arrogance (*jù ào* 倨傲) and perversity (*pì wéi* 僻違) he takes pride in surpassing other people (*jiāo yì rén* 驕溢人). If he is untalented, then with jealousy (*dù jí* 妒嫉) and slanderous complaints (*yuàn fēi* 怨誹) he tries to ruin other people (*qīng fù rén* 傾覆人) (*Xúnzǐ* Ch. 3. *HYXY* 6/3/8-10).

The petty man, *Xúnzǐ* notes here, is by definition one who is deserving of contempt, and it is worth noting that the term itself literally refers to a *small* man (*xiǎo rén* 小人), which reveals the extent to which *Xúnzǐ*'s effort to distinguish people morally is premised on an obviously hierarchical scheme based on size, and is thus about assigning people to higher and lower levels of moral worth. Indeed, *Xúnzǐ* begins this passage with a flat declaration that the petty man is “repulsive” (*chǒu* 醜) – a term that occupies the same semantic space as “contemptible” – and then proceeds to enumerate what it is about him that makes him so: his arrogance, pride, jealousy, and mean-spirited efforts to destroy others. In contrast to him is the gentleman, who approaches others with respect and modesty, and who is devoted to serving others. *Xúnzǐ*'s complaints against such petty people continue in a long succession of passages, where he identifies them as “arrogant and violent” (*màn ér bào* 慢而暴) and “perverse and dissolute” (*liú yín ér qīng* 流淫而傾). They have become, in *Xúnzǐ*'s account, *generic types* of people: without mincing words, he calls them “poisonous villains who create chaos” (*dú zéi ér luàn* 毒賊而亂) and “greedy thieves who work through deception” (*jué dào ér qián* 攫盜而漸). In Chapter 4, “On Honor and Disgrace,” *Xúnzǐ* expresses further contempt towards people who, among other vices, are prone to rage (*nù* 怒) and jealousy (*zhì* 伎), engage in slander (*zǐ* 訾), cannot control their mouths (*kǒu* 口), are combative (*zhēng* 爭), try to get the better of others (*shèng* 勝), and

greedy (*tān* 貪).<sup>15</sup> Xúnzǐ, in short, has much contempt for people who behave despicably.

Significantly, many of the qualities that he lists fall well within the scope of vices of contempt: uncontrolled rage, an uncontrolled mouth, an attitude of superiority, combativeness. Put simply, Xúnzǐ has contempt for contempt in the terms with which we often speak about it and invokes the kinds of attitudes and behaviors we associate with it in our contemporary political discourse. He has contempt for what we would call toxic contempt.

Underlying Xúnzǐ's contempt is a fundamental preoccupation with conflict and combativeness. Immediately following the passage from the chapter "On Honor and Disgrace" just cited, Xúnzǐ engages in an extended condemnation of "brawling" (*dòu* 鬥):

Every person who engages in brawling (*fán dòu zhě* 凡鬥者) is sure to think himself right and the other person wrong. If he thinks himself resolutely right and the other person resolutely wrong, then this is to consider himself a gentleman and the other a petty man, and to use the enmity between gentleman and petty man to harm and kill others. He forgets his own person below, forgets his family in the middle, and forgets his lord above. Is this not a grave fault!... Oh why do people engage in brawling? I would classify them as mad, confused, or ill, but I cannot, because the sage kings nevertheless punish them. I would classify them as birds, rodents, or beasts, but I cannot, because their form is nevertheless human, and their likes and dislikes are mostly the same as those of humans. Oh why do people engage in such brawling? I loathe it utterly (*Xúnzǐ* Ch. 4. *HYXY* 9/4/11-16).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Xúnzǐ Ch. 4. *HYXY* 8/4/3-10-9/4/6.

<sup>16</sup> Xúnzǐ's line, "I would classify them as mad, confused, or ill, but I cannot, because the sage kings nevertheless punish them," marks a fascinating Strawsonian moment (Strawson 1963).

Xúnzǐ's contempt for contempt thus seems to be motivated by an absolute abhorrence of all that leads to contention, conflict and violence. But it also targets, more specifically, contemptuous behavior, especially when it comes to those who are in high positions whose task it is to bring unity and harmony in the world.<sup>17</sup> This is how he describes the qualities of such a ruler:

The heart that can make the whole world submit is one wherein, if the person occupies a high position or is honored and noble, he does not use these to treat others arrogantly. If he is brilliant or has sagely wisdom, he does not use these to reduce others to dire straits. If he is swift or comprehends things quickly, he does not strive to surpass others. If he is steadfastly valiant or courageous and daring, he does not use these to harm others. If he does not know something, then he asks others about it. If he is unable to do something, then he learns how to do it. Or even if he is already capable, he is sure to be deferential. Only then does he have virtue. When he encounters his lord, then he enacts the proper conduct (*yì*) of a minister and subordinate. When he encounters his fellow-villager, then he enacts the proper conduct of an elder or junior. When he encounters his seniors, then he enacts the *yì* of a son or younger brother. When he encounters his friends, then he enacts the enacts the proper conduct of ritual restraint and deference. When he encounters those who are lowly or who are young, then he

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<sup>17</sup> Xúnzǐ's contempt towards such people bears striking similarities with Aristotle's account of the *megalopsychos*' contempt towards those who, possessing an exaggerated sense of their own worth, unjustifiably diminish others, as discussed by Kleanthis Mantzouranis in this issue. It also shares important commonalities with cases of apt contempt discussed by Michelle Mason (Mason 2003; 2018) and Macallister Bell (2005, 2013, 2018) – in the latter, particularly with regard to contempt as an appropriate counter-response to superbia.

enacts the enacts the proper conduct of being guiding and tolerant. *There are none for whom he does not feel concern. There are none to whom he does not show respect. On no occasion does he contend with others, but rather he is broad and open* just like the way Heaven and Earth encompass the myriad things. (Ch. 6. *HYXY* 16/6/27-31; my emphasis).

In Xúnzǐ's account, then, the exemplary person is one who embodies all-encompassing concern, and the way in which this concern is manifest is through respectful and deferential conduct towards all people. The larger picture here is thus an ideal of universal care for others – an ideal that Xúnzǐ aims to foster through a reconceptualization of ritual as the institutional foundation for society as a whole. This aim can be seen both in the way that he redefines the contempt of the exemplary person, as well as in the objects of his own contempt, which include, among other things, combativeness, vile speech, and arrogance. Ritual propriety, for Xúnzǐ, is no longer about giving form to one's affections towards one's own. It is, rather, about respect and deference in one's relationship to everyone and everything – towards Heaven, Earth and the myriad things.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has traced the meaning and significance of contempt in the *Analects* and in the *Xúnzǐ*, highlighting its distinctive contours in each text. It has shown, more specifically, the role of contempt in delineating and affirming the boundaries of the moral community, and the ways in which the very nature and scale of that contempt shifts dramatically from Confucius' era to

that of Xúnzǐ. This shift is not only of historical interest, but has practical implications for how we, today, might confront our own era of toxic contempt, the dangers of which Stephen Darwall's contribution to this issue has made abundantly clear. What might we possibly learn from the distinct ways in which Confucius and Xúnzǐ deployed contempt? And from the role that contempt played in their respective visions of how to bring about a proper moral society?

Darwall proposes in his paper that a heightened appreciation of love and respect is necessary for addressing the numerous “wages of contempt.” By practicing a more universal form of love that is directed towards our fellow human beings, regardless of their connections to us and of who they are, we can participate in the creation of new norms of social and political engagement and heal the divisions in our society. From the point of view of early Chinese ethics, a natural question to this would be: Yes, but how? This is where the historical pathways that we have just outlined might offer some insights. Intriguingly, a similar proposal to that of Darwall was made by the philosopher Mòzǐ, who lived between the time of Confucius and Xúnzǐ, and whose followers launched the first major critique against the early Confucians. Observing the widespread violence, corruption, misery and injustices of his own time, Mòzǐ proposed, as mentioned above, that the root of these ills was our inclination to be partial (*bié* 別) in our caring.<sup>18</sup> That is, the basic problem is that we love and care for those who are close to us rather than for all people, and thus pursue personal benefit at the expense of benefit for society as a whole. What we must do, then, is practice “impartial caring,” or *jiān ài* 兼愛, a form of love and caring that is directed at all people. Mòzǐ's doctrine of *jiān ài*, and its corresponding vision of the just community, was diametrically opposed to the Confucian idea that it was in fully realizing

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<sup>18</sup> See Virág (2017) 51-74 for a discussion of Mòzǐ's doctrine of impartial caring within the background of emergent universalist conceptions of the community, corresponding to the development of centralizing states during the Warring States period.



and giving proper expression to our love for those closest to us that we participated in the harmonious order of society at large – an idea that, as we have seen above, was not without its tensions.

What is significant to note here is that Mòzǐ's ideas, while influential for a few centuries, did not survive into the period of empire – at least not as a coherent body of doctrines and practices nominally attached to the figure of Mòzǐ. As is often remarked, a major part of the problem was that he did not begin with a realistic understanding of actual human inclinations and motivations. Nor did he provide a viable account of *how* to get people to love and care about all people. This, however, is precisely what Xúnzǐ does through his proposed ritual system. Xúnzǐ transforms ritual into something that is not just about calibrating and perfecting our relations with those we are already connected to – our parents, our friends, our social superiors and so on – but about using that ritual to extend love to the entire world. He proposes, in effect, an institutional and practical foundation for universal love and caring. If, for Confucius, ritual represents the perfection of the ties of affections within one's in-group, Xúnzǐ extends ritual as the basis of perfecting our relations with all under Heaven. He universalizes ritual and makes it the basis of what we would call a civil community (Virág 2021).

We see this shift played out in the various approaches that Confucius and Xúnzǐ take towards contempt. If Confucius' contempt tells us about *his* vision of community – a community linked through affective ties and that was in fundamental tension with the larger, impersonal community – Xúnzǐ's more moderated and circumscribed version of contempt is one that corresponds to an ideal of a universal community. Within that community, ritual no longer serves as an expression of affections within the in-group, such as the love of a child for her parents in the ritual of mourning. Instead, it is the basic mechanism through which the order and civility of

society at large might be maintained. And within that broader community, there is no space for anything other than unconditional displays of basic respect. But perhaps through that respect there can come other things – like reciprocity, mutual recognition and, sometimes, even love.

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