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Comment on 'Anger, Compassion and the Distinction between First and Third Person'

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ABSTRACT

In my paper, I argue that a first-person perspective (the perspective of a patient/recipient of an action) pertaining to response analysis is significant in Confucianism given the deeply personal nature of Confucianism. It matters whether oneself or others is the patient of an action because Confucianism as a virtue theory emphasizes self-reflection and reflexivity of one's response in self-cultivation. Moreover, as an account of role-ethics, Confucianism calls attention to one's particular relationship with others—one reacts differently in kind, not just in degrees, depending on whether one's or others' family is at risk. I also appeal to Thomas Nagel's framework of objectivity vs subjectivity to help elucidate the Confucian position on the value of an individual's particular perspective, distinguishing the person who is the patient from other people. Finally, I revisit the mirror and the one body analogy discussed by Shun and highlight their point of impartiality rather than objectivity as implied by Shun.

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KEYWORDS Nagel; Confucianism; mirror; one body; first person; virtues; role-ethics; anger; compassion

1. Introduction

In the paper 'Anger, Compassion and the Distinction between First and Third Person', Professor Shun [2023: 327] tries to illustrate a Confucianism inspired account that 'focuses primarily on the *situations* to which we are responding, rather than on the *objects* affected in the situations' when analysing our responses. By objects, Shun means persons in the role of patients (as opposed to agents). He comments that the focus on persons as patients is common among contemporary Western accounts of ethics and this focus leads to an over-emphasis on the distinction between a first-person and a third-person perspective when explaining responses. Appealing to the Confucian metaphors of mirror and one body and using our responses of anger and compassion as illustration, he argues carefully to deflect this emphasis. Professor Shun's thesis is thought-provoking and his nuanced analysis of our responses of anger and compassion provides a convincing argument that our self-interest is not the predominant factor driving our responses in many cases. His allusion to the metaphors of the mirror and one body also aptly and insightfully brings out some interesting and distinctive points about the Confucian approach. On the other hand, I believe

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that Confucianism is in a sense deeply personal, making a first-person perspective indispensable.

The focus of my comments below is not to assess the merits of Shun's thesis as a general account of our responses to a situation. Instead, I shall argue for the significance of a first-person perspective in Confucianism pertaining to response analysis. More specifically, I shall adopt a three-pronged approach in my argument. First, I shall borrow Thomas Nagel's framework of objectivity versus subjectivity to help elucidate the Confucian position on the value of an individual's particular perspective. Second, I shall look at the role of first-person perspective in Confucianism as a virtue theory, and, third, its role in Confucianism as role-ethics. I shall also appeal to the point of impartiality in the mirror and the one body analogy to support my position. My arguments, however, are preliminary and sketchy due to space limit. They are initial explorations that hopefully will lead to future, more satisfactory treatments of the issue.

2. First- and Third-Person Perspectives

First, let us have a firmer grasp of Shun's ideas of first- and third-person perspectives. Shun describes the first-person perspective and the third-person perspective in various ways. He first introduces them as:

> If that individual is myself, I stand in a reflexive relation to that individual and will be responding from some distinctive first-person point of view. If that individual is someone else, I will be responding from a third-person point of view [ibid.: 328].

Later, he relates the two perspectives in his account to Strawson's reactive attitudes. According to Strawson, the first-person perspective refers to 'non-detached attitudes and reactions of people directly involved in transactions with each other . . . the attitudes and reactions of offended parties and beneficiaries' [Strawson 1962: 3]; the third-person perspective as 'reactions to the qualities of others' wills, not towards ourselves, but towards others' [ibid.: 8]. Strawson [ibid] describes them respectively as 'personal reactive attitudes' and 'the generalized or vicarious analogues of the personal reactive attitudes' with resentment as an example of the former and indignation of the latter. Another mark Shun points to is that a first-person perspective gives information that is more intimate and unmediated, while a third-person perspective gives more remote information. A third-person perspective is also to be contrasted with empathy, 'which involves seeing things from the harmed party's perspective and having feelings congruent with the other party's emotional state' [Shun 2023: 334]. Shun cautions that the distinction he makes is not meant to capture all aspects of these two perspectives. For example, his use of a first-person perspective does not include 'how an individual affected in a situation might experience what has transpired in a way that is fundamentally different from the experience of some observer', such as grief or physical injury. And a third-person perspective in his account does not mean the capacity 'to view a situation in a more removed manner, so as to attain a more balanced understanding of the situation' [ibid.: 329]. Shun also excludes from his account the possible complexity of the distinctions as different modes of ethical reflection. It can be seen throughout the paper, that the crux of Shun's distinction lies with 'the *distinctness* of a responder from the harmed party' [ibid.: 338], that is, whether the person herself is a patient or just an onlooker.

Note that if being a patient versus an onlooker is the key in drawing the distinction between the first- and third-person perspective in Shun's account, the two distinctions do not really map onto Strawson's conceptions, as Shun has alleged. For in Strawson's account of reactive attitudes, attitudes such as resentment reflect a relationship between an agent and a patient. A third-person perspective involves no such relationship. Also, a third-person reactive attitude of indignation is a generalized 'vicarious analogue' of a first-person attitude of resentment. This concern about relationship and the dependence of the third-person perspective on the first-person one is not found in Shun's account.[1]

3. Shun's Argument in a Nutshell

Shun believes that it is the situation rather than the differentiation between a first- and a third-person perspective that plays a more important explanatory role in our understanding of people's responses to a situation. Certainly, as Shun himself acknowledges, in a sense, every response is a response to a situation. However, this does not mean that we can fully understand a response by merely noting the features of a situation such as whether it causes benefits or harms. He also recognizes the need to take into account the features of a responder such as her previous experience with the situation. What Shun rejects, however, is the relevance of the status of the responder as the actual patient or an onlooker, or in other words, the relevance of the distinction between a first- and a third-person perspective. His claim that we should focus on the situation and not on 'the objects affected in the situations' should be understood in light of this distinction between a patient and an onlooker.

Using anger as an illustration, he points to various features of a situation as determinants of a response. These features include the nature, the magnitude and the significance of benefits and harms caused by an action, the character and dispositions of the agent, the relationship between the agent and the patient, the context such as whether it is a public or private action, and whether the action is personally directed or not. If a serious harm is done deliberately to an innocent person, whether one is the actual victim or an onlooker judging the situation, one feels anger. In most cases, one's role as a patient will lead to a higher degree of emotional and motivational reaction than from someone who is an onlooker. However, Shun emphasizes, this only illustrates a difference in degree, not in kinds, between these two responses. Hence, it is not justified to postulate another perspective to explain the two responses. Setting aside the difference in degree then, the two responses correlate similarly with the different features of a situation, making the situation a more important variable in explaining people's responses.

Using compassion as another illustration, Shun again dismisses the explanatory role of the distinction between a first- and a third-person perspective. In Mencius's example of feeling compassion towards a child about to fall into a well, one's response, Shun argues, involves the heart's being alarmed, pained, distressed by, and being unable to bear the situation in the sense of not bearing to witness, bring about, or allow the continuance of the situation. Such response is a response to a feature of the situation—a vivid encounter with imminent harm. Again, Shun emphasizes that one would feel these feelings, indeed in the same intimate and unmediated form as compassion (or self-compassion), regardless of whether one is a patient or an onlooker.

[1] Strawson's account has interesting resemblance to Hume's [2000] account of generating a third-person perspective through the mechanism of sympathy.

Other variables that might produce the sameness of response from these two roles include a very close relationship between the onlooker and the patient (e.g. being the patient's parent), or a sense of accountability for the patient (e.g. being the patient's teacher).

Shun uses two Confucian metaphors—the mirror and one body—to illustrate the normative Confucian position on the issue and further explicate and argue for his position. The Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi claims, 'It (the mind) is like a mirror reflecting things . . . it just follows things and responds' (cited in Shun 2023: 330]. The gist of the mirror analogy, Shun explains, is to highlight the idea that our responses to a situation is an interplay of two factors: the situation with its various elements and the quality of the mirror. The mirror stands for the mind. Whether we are happy or sad, for example, depends on how a situation impacts us, but also on our own psychology. A tainted and dusty mirror will blur the image, just as our own bias or self-centredness will distort our interpretation of a situation; a bright mirror will reflect accurately the object it confronts as the mind of a sage will respond in a way that is merited by the features of a situation.

The ideal of one body can be seen from the Neo-Confucian Wang Yangming's claim 'At bottom, Heaven, Earth and all things are *my body*. Is there any suffering or bitterness of the great masses that is not disease or pain in *my own body*?' (cited in Shun [ibid.: 334]). Shun emphasizes that the ideal of one body does not imply the elimination of the individual self in the metaphysical sense. It is about the connectedness between people [ibid.: 338]. While following the one body ideal is to 'sensitize our heart to expand the scope of its sensitivity . . . Ideally, we should respond in this intimate and unmediated fashion to situations involving harm to any' [ibid.: 336–7]. Connectedness between people, Shun claims, does not mean that they are connected epistemologically or/and motivationally by some special link so that each actually feels and is moved by the pain and suffering of the other [ibid.: 338–9].[2] Instead, connectedness refers to the sharing of the same response in an intimate and non-mediated way, irrespective of whether one is a patient or an onlooker. Again, given the sameness of these two responses, Shun concludes that it is the features of a situation that are the important variables in explaining our responses.

In sum, the two analogies of mirror and one body, according to Shun, illustrate that the normative responses to a situation are to be explained by a situation and not the distinction between a first- and third-person perspective. In what follows, I shall argue that, contra Shun, the role of being a patient does contribute to make a significant difference to one's response because of reasons of autonomy, self-cultivation, and relationships. Let us start with the reasons of autonomy.

4. Nagel: Reasons of Autonomy[3]

Nagel [1989] advocates what he calls agent-relative reason/value on top of agent-neutral reason/value.[4] Agent-neutral reason/value is seen from an objective (if not

[2] Some interpreters might indeed hold this position, see e.g. Ivanhoe [2017: 67–8].

[3] Although Nagel's account is focused on ethics, on what is the valid reason or value that grounds one's action rather than questions in moral psychology about how and/or should one respond in a situation as in Shun's account, many of his points are still applicable to Shun's question.

[4] Nagel borrows the terms from Derek Parfit, though he gives them different meanings. The two terms can be seen as the analog of subjective and objective reasons discussed by Nagel [1979].

exactly a view from nowhere) vantage point, and agent-relative reason/value from the vantage point of a particular person. Agent-neutral reason/value does not make any essential reference to a particular person. It can be seen as impersonal and akin to intrinsic value, in that its value is independent of any person. Agent-relative reason/value, on the other hand, is marked by a free agent-variable—her project, her obligation—and applies only to the person having it. Nagel recognizes the legitimacy of three kinds of agent-relative reasons/values: reasons of autonomy, deontological reasons, and reasons of obligations. The first reason concerns one's project, ambition, and commitment, which relates to an agent as an autonomous person making substantial choices; the second reason is about moral restrictions forbidding one to perform a certain action, such as the obligation not to lie; the third reason pertains to special obligations one owes to people with whom one has a special relationship, such as filial obligations.

Let's examine briefly Nagel's reasoning regarding agent-neutral and agent-relative values. Nagel [1989: 152–3] believes that values have different degrees of externality, or independence from the concerns of sentient beings. Arguably, some aesthetic values are external. For values that are not entirely external, they can still be endorsed by human perspectives. To treat a world full of many particular perspectives equally and impartially, Nagel suggests that we should privilege the values commonly shared among them, and the objective perspective is the correct tool to identify those common values. Hence Nagel grants the objective perspective a privileged position in conferring values. Our inner mental states, including pleasure, pain or sensory states that we strongly like or dislike, and goods such as freedom, self-respect, and fulfilment of basic needs, can be endorsed as objective as they are 'close to home,' and 'come as close as possible to being universal' [ibid.: 179]. In contrast, a project such as climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro has agent-relative value only. While this value can be recognized from an objective perspective, its acceptance can only be made from the perspective of someone having this project. The objective perspective is privileged but it is not hegemonic. There is no necessity or desirability in eliminating particular perspectives completely from the domain of real values. After all, we cannot but live our lives through a particular perspective. Hence things embraced through these particular perspectives should still be accorded certain values and protection. The interactions of a perspectival, particular self and an objective self in a dual-self framework determine the worth of agent-relative values.

It is obvious that Nagel's agent-relative reasons of obligations could be endorsed by Confucianism. So would be reasons of autonomy, I believe.[5] Confucius always encourages students to make their own judgements and praises students who take the initiative to think for themselves. Even when they judge or choose wrongly, he criticizes but seldom intervenes [Confucius 1979: *Analects* 7:8, 5:26, 11:24, 17:19]. Distinctive individual perspectives are acceptable in Confucianism. Another example underscoring individual judgments in Confucianism is the idea of discretion (*quan* 權). Discretion is to be exercised when the rules of *li* are insufficient to guide our action. It is seen as valuable if used appropriately [ibid.: 9:30; Mencius 1970: 7A:26]. Through discretion, diverse individual judgments are considered acceptable or even praiseworthy. When Mencius suggests in the hypothetical case that the sage Shun would use his discretion to leave his throne and take his father who has committed

[5] Nagel's reasons of obligation are much more controversial, so this paper will not examine them.

a murder to exile, must Mencius believe that all sages would come to the same conclusion? Probably not.

One might object to this claim about autonomous judgments in Confucianism by pointing to Mencius's belief that humans have the same preference of taste in food, music and beauty. Mencius [*Mencius* 6A:7] points to the culinary master Yi Ya who is supposed to achieve advanced knowledge about taste earlier than others, so that others should follow and learn from him.

There are credible replies to this objection. First, even if we accept a fairly literal interpretation of Mencius's claim, it is still the case that most people's actual tastes are different from that of the master, otherwise, no learning is required. Confucius's responses to his students as explained above might suggest that different tastes should be recognized and protected, though they are not yet ideal.

Moreover, Mencius's claim about universal taste need not be interpreted literally. Yi Ya need not be seen as having grasped some gastronomic truths that everyone would be able to access given proper training. Instead, his claim is compatible with the idea of multiple gastronomic truths with the same valence, and these truths are slight variations of each other. According to this alternative interpretation, Yi Ya gained access to one of the truths; following Yi Ya might mean accessing Yi Ya's taste or some other truths. A third interpretation expresses constructivism or a kind of sophisticated relativism. It rejects the idea of gastronomic truth, sees taste judgments as perspectival, and suggests that the standard of superiority only reflects at most an intersubjective consensus. According to the second and third interpretation, the claim about innate taste preference therefore is only about the innate ability to achieve a certain level of sophistication in taste judgment. We do not need to settle these meta-questions; indeed, it is not obvious that Confucianism has a stance on them. The point is that Mencius's claim leaves room for a multiple instead of a monolithic Confucian ideal good.

There is textual support for the idea of multiple ideal goods in Confucianism. Mencius [*Mencius* 5B:1] said, 'Po Yi was the sage who was unsullied; Yi Yin was the sage who accepted responsibility; Liu Hsia Hui was the sage who was easy-going; Confucius was the sage whose actions were timely'. The Confucian sages are portrayed as having different personalities and choices. This provides support to the idea that Confucianism can endorse different particular perspectives. Confucian agents will have different projects reflecting personal interests, strengths and commitments. Some *junzi* will focus more on teaching, others on writing, philosophical contemplation or other worthy projects. If so, it matters whether one's project is affected, especially when the value/reason of one's project will not be accepted, though still recognized by others. The first-person perspective has a place in Confucianism.

5. Moral Cultivation and Reflexivity

A widely accepted interpretation of Confucianism is to see it as an account of virtue ethics (see e.g. Angle and Slote [2013]). A Confucian agent engages in moral cultivation to attain the moral transformation of her character and become a *junzi*. Learning the rites (*li*), the Confucian classics and studying under a Confucian master are pivotal means of moral cultivation. Also important is self-reflection. The Confucian disciple Tseng Tzu said, 'Every day I examine myself on three counts. In what I have undertaken on another's behalf, have I failed to do my best? In my dealings with my

friends have I failed to be trustworthy in what I say' [*Analects* 1:4]. Tseng Tzu's claim shows that one main goal of self-reflection is to discover one's faults and inadequacies so as to work on them and improve. Given this goal, one's responses should be one main object of one's scrutiny, for responses can be equally, if not more, telling about one's attitudes, values, judgments and dispositions than one's deliberations, choice and actions. After all, responses are for real, as they occur when we are face to face with real-world consequences, rather than merely anticipating or expecting them. Our responses are especially revealing when they are spontaneous, emotionally involved and unexpected, as those responses are more beyond the reach of our conscious control and therefore more authentic.

Responses are treated seriously in the texts, especially those that are self-regarding or relationship-based. The former is important because it throws light directly on the self, the object of self-cultivation, the latter because many fundamental values in Confucianism such as filial piety relate to relationships. Shame, a self-regarding feeling, is identified as one of the four innate minds of humans. Being given undeserved, or worse, unrighteousness gifts, or acting immorally without feeling shame is shameful and deplorable [*Analects* 5:25, 8:13; *Mencius* 4B:33]. And a beggar, out of feelings of self-respect, will choose to starve to death rather than accepting food thrown at him in a humiliating way [Mencius 6A:10]. If one's integrity is doubted, out of a sense of honour, one should respond with upright forcefulness. When Confucius' disciple censured him for acting in a morally improper way, he vehemently protested [*Analects* 6:28]. Feelings of resentment need to be examined to see if they are appropriate. Inadequate resentment reflects insufficient concern, excessive resentment belies inflated self-importance. The sage Shun's filial piety is revealed in his resentment towards his parents' apathy towards him [*Mencius* 5A:1]; a filial son, on the other hand, should not resent his parents even if they ignore his remonstration [*Analects* 4:18].

Note that all the feelings mentioned above are expressed from a first-person perspective. My feeling ashamed on behalf of others is not the same as feeling shameful for myself, as only the latter makes me turn the attention onto myself and want to hide. This turning the light on oneself can also be said about the other two self-regarding feelings of self-respect and sense of honour. In the same vein, the relationship-based feelings of resentment also cannot be shared from a third-person perspective. Others can disapprove, abhor, feel angry or sad about how the sage Shun's parents treated him, but resentment would not be an intelligible response. Only Shun himself can rightly feel resentment towards his parents.

As the readiness to reflect and self-examine is the mindset of a person engaged in moral cultivation, the way one is being treated should prompt further self-scrutiny. This is because interactions among people are often reciprocal:

> He who loves others is constantly loved by them. He who respects others is constantly respected by them. Here is a man, who treats me in a perverse and unreasonable manner. The superior man in such a case will turn around upon himself, 'I must have been wanting in benevolence; I must have been wanting in propriety - how should this have happened to me?' He examines himself, and is specially benevolent. [*Mencius* 4B:29]

Such *inquiry*, however, would and should not arise from a third-person perspective, unless one has reason to think that the patient is at fault.

The importance of a patient's first-person perspective can also be clearly seen in the cardinal Confucian value of *shu*. *Shu*: 'what one does not want, do not do to others'

[*Analects* 15:23] can be understood as the Confucian Golden rule. *Shu* is about taking oneself as an analogy in deciding how to treat others. It asks one to imagine oneself in the shoes of the recipient of one's contemplated action and takes the feelings and thoughts one has in that role to guide one's decision (see Chan [2000] for a detailed discussion of the meaning of imagining oneself in another's shoes). That Confucius prescribes shu, instead of asking one to adopt a third-person perspective to objectively assess the consequences of one's actions, indicates his privileging a patient's first-person perspective. The reasons for this preference perhaps are not merely because a patient's first-person perspective would generally provide a viewpoint that will minimize biases coming from being the agent of the action, render the effects of one's action vivid and contextually sensitive, and have a high degree of concern for the result. These could not be the exhaustive set of reasons, because, as Shun has pointed out earlier, a first- and a third-person perspective in this case might just generate responses that are different in degree, not in kind, hence not reflecting two distinctive perspectives**.** A first-person perspective is preferable, I believe, because it is 'close to home', drawing deeply from one's self, hence reflecting a particularized understanding, sensitivity and alertness to the context, as well to the concrete and subtle implications of the actions, rather than having some general, abstract grasp of the situation made from a third-person perspective.

More importantly, *Shu* makes the distinctive contribution to help personalize an action in a deeper and broader way by ingeniously requiring a person to intertwine the two roles of an agent and a patient together as a 'situated' particular self. Above all, self-transformation is for someone who interacts with the world in a personally engaged and involved way, whether as an agent or a patient. It is therefore no coincidence that Confucius describes *shu* as the one thread that runs through Confucius's doctrine [*Analects* 4:15].

5. Values of Relationship

Another popular alternative interpretation of Confucianism is to see it as an account of role-ethics, with special emphasis on the five relationship roles: roles pertaining to the ruler-minister, father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger brothers and friend-friend relationships [Ames 2011]. In this account, one's primary ethical duty and goal is to meet one's role-related obligations, to protect and foster these five relationships. Engagement in these relationships constitutes meaningful and fulfilling lives for people. Confucianism also allows a flexible extension of the five relationships to other relationships. For example, a teacher-student relationship can sometimes be subsumed under the father-son relationship, and colleagues as friend-friend or elder-younger brother. The flexible interpretation of family [King 1981] facilitates people in a community relating to each other as extended relations.

If a response is relationship-based, then a first- or third-person perspective cannot be interchanged. My filial affection towards my parents can only be felt by me, not by others who are not my parents' children. That explains why Strawson [1962], whose account is also relationship-based, explains a third-person perspective response as a vicarious analogue of a response from a first-person perspective. Given the Confucian role-ethics, relationship-based responses are emphasized. The Mencian innate mind of reverence and respect is seen as the paradigmatic feeling a younger brother has towards his elder brother in response to the latter's friendliness and caring. Gratitude and filial

love should be the response of a son towards his parents for their gift of life, nurturing and love [*Mencius* 7A:15, *Analects* 17:21]. In light of the Confucian role-ethics, many of the interactions among people who are not apparently personally related should indeed be understood as relationship-based. A colleague's irresponsible act which affects oneself does not just produce disappointment; one might feel hurt for her inconsiderateness about oneself when collegial relationships assume the shade of friendship. One might only feel sadness after learning about one's failure if one is among a group of strangers or acquaintance, but if one is among members of one's community, one might feel shameful, as one's standing in the community is at stake. And when one finds that an alumna of one's high school sports team with which one has strongly identified has committed a grievous crime, one would feel like sharing some kind of disgrace, or alternatively some sense of honour, if she has made some outstanding accomplishment. In the Confucian context where personalization of relationships and group identification are more rampant, a first-person perspective assumes more significance.

6. Mirror, One Body, and Impartiality

To further examine whether the situation or a distinctive first-person perspective is the more useful explanatory tool to account for our responses, it might be useful to cast the issue in Nagel's framework of objectivity and subjectivity. To recall, what is objective does not hinge on a particular perspective of an individual, whereas what is subjective does. In a world of multiple individual perspectives with their diversity, multifariousness, and sometimes irreconcilable conflicts, arriving at a normative response to a situation can be intractable. Shun's suggestion of focusing on the features of a situation for a normative response leans towards the objective track[6]; the emphasis on an individual's first-person perspective, on the other hand, points to the subjective track. Going solely on the objective track can offer clean and clear guidelines, without the messiness of navigating incommensurable subjective values. Yet, the objective track is costly, for people live their lives through their particular perspectives. A life detached from a particular perspective is meaningless, unmotivated and bland. The subjective track, on the other hand, seems to be dead-ended, as multiple perspectives often involve incommensurable values. Nagel suggests, as we have seen earlier, to use impartiality to navigate among the particular perspectives. Interestingly, I believe this is the Confucian response too! In what follows, I shall argue how the two Confucian metaphors of mirror and one body stand for the value of impartiality (*gong*), a view also espoused by Shun [2005], though in the paper reviewed here, he seems to emphasize what is objective and impersonal.

To recall, Shun analogizes the mind of a sage to a mirror, which reflects the situation as it is without inserting any personal prejudice. A normative response, Shun suggests, is one entirely grounded in the features of a situation. In doing so, Shun downplays one crucial element of the mirror metaphor: the active role of mirror.

Mirrors in the Chinese philosophical tradition are seen as possessing broad and mysterious powers, connected to Heaven and *yin-yang*. A mirror is understood as a

[6] To say this does not mean that Shun ignores the role of subjective experiences such as feelings in a response. Such recognition can be clearly seen in his claim about sensitizing one's heart. Yet subjectivity in the sense of agent-relativity is, as I have argued, downplayed in Shun's thesis.

light source that illumines and brings clarity, revealing objects and not merely passively reflecting [Cline 2008]. Shun himself makes a similar point in another paper when he highlights Zhu Xi's comparison of the Confucian virtue of *ren* (benevolence) to the brightness of a mirror, *si* (partiality) to dust, and *gong* (impartiality) to the absence of dust [Shun 2005: 7]. We should note that while dust obstructs the functioning of a mirror, absence of dust, however, does not yet imply the brightness of a mirror. For brightness also depends on the make of the mirror. As a mirror's well-functioning requires a quality from the mirror itself, namely brightness, an ideal response similarly requires a particular virtue of the sage—*ren*. The mirror metaphor therefore affirms the active role of the mind of the sage: his ability to penetrate to the deep, subtle points, to bring clarity to eliminate confusion, and to have a clear, unwavering adherence to the principles so as to arrive at the righteous decision. The early Confucian Xunzi comments, 'a muddied brightness casts an external shadow, and a pure brightness shows a reflection from within. The sage follows his desires and fulfils his emotions, but having regulated them, he accords with rational principles of order' [Knoblock 1994: 109].

This is not to suggest that Shun denies the contribution of the mind in the mirror metaphor. He notes that the ideal response is 'made appropriate by the nature of the situation, along with the substantive ethical conception that we work with' [Shun 2023: 330]. This seems to point to the role of interpretation. Nevertheless, it is obvious that Shun emphasizes the reflection function much more than the role of interpretation in the mirror metaphor.

If the mirror metaphor does reckon with the role of interpretation, then an ideal normative response is not a mere tracking of the objective features of a situation. What is essential is to have an impartial interpretation, which is not equivalent to objectivity. Impartiality only means ruling out bias, especially selfish desires and thought, but not every particular perspectival idea should be considered bias and be eliminated. Hence, a mirror might still reflect a particular point of view, as mirrors of different materials (bronze, glass, silver, etc.) give different reflections. Sages' ideal normative responses can also be multifarious.

As for the one body metaphor, Shun interprets it as being about connectedness among people in the sense that people have expanded sensitivity towards each other so that they can have similar responses in an intimate and unmediated fashion. Differences in response to a situation therefore are to be accounted for by differences in the features of a situation. However, this conclusion is not fully grounded. For the one body metaphor does not imply sameness of response. It is, again, about impartiality towards everybody. As Shun [2005: 6] has explained, Zhu Xi believes that:

> To form one body with the ten thousand things is *gong*; by contrast, *si* has to do with focusing on oneself, or on people and things that one forms association with, in a way that inappropriately neglects other people and things.

If so, impartiality is compatible with diversity, not necessitating sameness. Parts of a body can be distinct from each other: Our ears, eyes, hands, nose, tongues, and feet all have different functions and provide information about the world through different modes. Similarly, a first-person and a third-person perspective can yield very different responses, as I have argued so far.

To make one last defence of the importance of a first-person perspective, let me engage directly with the two cases of anger and compassion. To start with, my

reflexive anger towards myself belongs to a different category from an onlooker's anger towards me when the sense of agency is felt to be intimately intertwined with the anger in the former but not the latter. Alternatively, if I am a victim of systematic racism, I should feel angry, not mere indignation like an onlooker as the attack is to my identity.[7] And even when I am not the direct victim, if I share the same group membership, I am still not a neutral onlooker. I should still feel angry as systematic racism is an act directed toward a whole group, hence my adoption of a first-person perspective is still justified. A first-person perspective again is especially pertinent to cases involving harms to my family or threatening my commitments/ground projects. Granted that in all these cases, an onlooker can feel indignation and even anger, the anger of an onlooker, however, cannot be of the same nature as anger experienced by the patient. If the threats and harms are serious, the patient would experience an anger that stems from her core and whose redress is necessary to restore her dignity if not personhood. Even when the harms and threats are more moderate, her attachment to the threatened object would still drive a type of anger that is based on who she is as a person. The attachment also shines a light on the threatened object that enables the patient to have a unique appreciation and connection with the object that is not shared by others, making the anger felt and expressed particularly personal. For example, think about Confucius as a dedicated teacher. The threatened loss of his most favourite and admired student Yan Hui whom he treated like a son would strike a chord that could only be understood from his first-person perspective. The generic terms, 'a favourite student', 'a beloved one' which a third-person perspective can relate to do little justice to the experience of loss that he would suffer [*Analects* ch 11].

Similarly, in a situation of imminent harm as in the case of compassion, we would expect different responses from a first and a third person. A first person's reflexive response of fight or flight, a sense of vulnerability and desperation when facing the danger, and the feeling of narrow escape in the aftermath of the threat are very different from an onlooker's response of alarm and distress, no matter how concerned and closely attached the onlooker is to the patient. Shun is right that a patient can experience self-compassion as analogous to an onlooker's compassion, but self-compassion can only supplement, and never replaces these other feelings of the patient. Furthermore, though self-compassion and compassion share elements such as caring, understanding, and desiring relief for the object, compassion from others express social affirmation and bonding that is lacking in self-compassion.

7. Conclusion

By underscoring the values of autonomy (having a particular perspective), moral cultivation (requiring self-examination and engaged agency), and relationships in Confucianism, I have so far argued for the significance of a patient's first-person perspective in a Confucian account. I have also argued against Shun's interpretation of the two metaphors of mirror and one body. For both, I point to the value of impartiality to counter Shun's suggestion of objectivity. Impartiality is rightly heralded as a primary value in Confucianism as it addresses the deeply personal nature of Confucianism, understood either as an account of virtue ethics or role ethics. It does matter whether one is the affected party in a situation not because one's interests

[7] I thank an anonymous reviewer for the suggestion of this example.

are injured. After all, interests are too crude a factor to adequately explain our responses. Rather it matters because one is in a particular relationship with someone or, more basically, one is to engage with the world as a distinct individual with her particular aspirations and challenges.

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