

Moral Anger in Classical Confucianism

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Philosophical discussions of the moralization of anger have not, to date, substantively engaged classical Chinese thought. This is unfortunate, given the abundance of appeals to moral anger in the classical literature, especially among the Confucians, and the suppression, expression, and functionalization of anger. Accordingly, this essay engages in two general projects: one interpretive, one applied. The interpretive project examines the manner in which classical Confucian thought regards anger as having both destructive and constructive aspects, how these aspects are unavoidable human experiences, and how they can (and should) be regulated or recruited by ritualized social forms. Specifically, while the early Confucians at times depict anger as a precarious feeling to be assuaged, there are circumstances in which anger is not only understandable, but morally warranted. In this tradition, adherence to ritual prescriptions is a primary means by which problematic anger is alleviated while moral anger is effectively expressed, achieving prosocial ends without producing undue harm. This understanding and analysis of anger from a Confucian perspective gives rise to an applied project that considers how even contemporary, non-Confucians can ritualize and deploy anger for positive moral and political ends. In particular, I examine how forms of reconciliation, etiquette, and protest can be construed as rituals through which moral anger is effectively channeled.

The Interpretive Project

A History of Anger

The flourishing period of classical Confucianism is traditionally dated between the fifth and third centuries BCE, originating with the teachings of Confucius (Kongzi 孔子 or “Master Kong,” 551-479 BCE) and extending through the Warring States Period (~475-221 BCE) of China’s history. In many ways, Confucianism’s rise and development are reactionary to this era of mass civil war: against a backdrop of bloodshed, corruption, and decay, Confucianism advocated philosophical and political resolutions to the widespread chaos. These resolutions were intended not merely to establish sociopolitical order, but to promote flourishing and harmony throughout the realm. To this end, one of the foci of the Confucian ethical-political project was the aim of establishing communities whose members could harmoniously coexist, a goal that required means for handling potentially disruptive dispositions including sorrow (*ai* 哀), disgust (*wu* 惡) and, most importantly for present purposes, anger (*nu* 怒).^{1, 2}

It will likely come as no shock that the early Confucians recognized anger’s propensity for driving humans to violent and morally problematic actions and outlooks; anger has a destructive aspect. For example, Mengzi (Meng Ke 孟軻, 372-289 BCE) claims that a mark of moral goodness is that one does not “store up” anger against siblings and regards them affectionately (*Mengzi* 5A3, 9.3/47/12).³ Clinging to the anger, allowing it to build up over time, increases the likelihood of one becoming violent or distant, even with one’s kin.⁴ Additionally, anger is sometimes regarded as a cause of clouded judgement, and so cannot be a consistently reliable resource for determining best courses of action. Similar to Mengzi, Xunzi (Xun Kuang 荀況, 3rd C. BCE) acknowledges that acting on (or in) anger can lead to deleterious consequences. In particular, Xunzi urges rulers that self-restraint is of utmost importance when angered, especially in the application of punishment (e.g. *Xunzi* 24/118/18, 24/119/3), or when

hearing from subordinates (*Xunzi* 27/127/18).⁵ Thus, even though one feels anger, that anger cannot be allowed to drive one to violence or foolishness; a more calculated, level-headed way of engaging with the world is ideal (e.g., *Xunzi* 31/147/17-18). One should aim to restrain oneself and behave in a manner that is conducive to civility and harmony.⁶

Given such rebukes of anger, it might come as a surprise to find that early Confucians, while emphasizing moral cultivation, political order, and social harmony, are not wholly averse to endorsing anger. Contrary to schools of thought that call for strict purgation of disruptive emotions, such as certain strands of Buddhism and Daoism, the Confucians instead look on anger as a basic, natural human disposition; that is, part of being human simply is having and experiencing anger.⁷ Consequently, the Confucians do not regard anger as being inherently morally bad. In point of fact, several historical figures that the Confucians depict as moral exemplars are described as faultlessly displaying anger in their moral endeavors. Of particular note are Wen and Wu, the first kings of the Zhou Dynasty, whose culture the early Confucians claim as a recurring source of inspiration. According to Mengzi, Wen, with a display of anger, could provide tranquility for all in the realm, a trait shared by his successor:

If there was a single villain in the realm, then King Wu was ashamed. This was the courage of King Wu, and with just one show of anger he was able to pacify the people of the realm. (*Mengzi* 1B3, 2.3/8/31)

Xunzi offers similar praise:

When King Wu of Zhou was stirred to anger
To the fields of Mu he brought his army.
The soldiers of [Tyrant] Zhou changed their direction.
(*Xunzi* 25/120/8-9, Hutton trans., modified, 264)

Kwong-loi Shun suggests that this appeal to anger is akin to moral outrage that manifests by spurring one to action to rectify unjust or immoral circumstances (2015, 314). The invocation of Wu's anger in these passages, then, does not necessarily refer to any sort of blind or bodily rage, nor is it necessarily associated with an intent to harm or do ill to another person. Rather, it is a rectificatory anger aimed at promoting pro-moral and harmonious political ends. In this sense, anger also has a constructive aspect.

Before proceeding further with this analysis, it will help to distinguish anger from a disposition like rage (*fen* 忿). Rage, which the Confucians treat as a disposition unto itself, is typically depicted as sudden and severe, its expression akin to an outburst or a tantrum (*Analects* 12.21/33/1-3). Rage is a moment of being mindlessly incensed. Anger, on the other hand, can endure and even possess intellectual qualities (e.g., the aforementioned aim of moral or political rectification). One feels a burst of rage when being cut off in traffic; one feels a seething anger when one is faced with systematic abuse by a (toxic) friend. In the former case, the feeling is immediate and violent, but tends to pass not long after the incident.⁸ In the latter case, however, the feeling can wax and wane, but nonetheless persist indefinitely and be accompanied by thoughts about the nature of the abuse that give rise to a variety of psychological complexes. The two can co-occur and may influence one another, but are nonetheless distinct dispositions.

Returning to the Confucian notion of anger proper: the regard for anger as a response that moral exemplars may rightly have suggested that the Confucians were not mere pacifist pedants,⁹ but scholarly advocates for what they perceived as positive social transformation. While stopping far short of advancing a democratic or revolutionary political theory, the appeals to the anger of Wen and Wu imply that the Confucians perceive an imperative to strive for what is morally righteous, and that anger can serve as a legitimate motivating force for one's

striving.¹⁰ The relevant passages also imply that even the mere display of anger, if it be truly in the right, is sufficient to at least begin a social project of correction, culminating in harmony.¹¹ Why, however, ought one to think that anger, which can have destructive and disruptive properties, is conducive to such an ethical-political project? To answer this question, it will help to understand the Confucian treatment of anger as a natural and inalienable feature of human living.

Anger as Natural Response

The classical Confucian account of the origin of anger is an appropriate topic with which to begin this deeper enquiry. As noted earlier, anger is thought by the Confucians to originate as one of the most basic dispositions of the human psyche.¹² Xunzi in particular explicitly suggests that, while proper control over such dispositions is quintessential to flourishing, so too is accommodating and nourishing them (*Xunzi* 17/80/9-15).¹³ Consequently, the Confucians regard anger as an inherent feature of the human experience: being human includes not only the capacity to feel anger, but actually experiencing it and living both with and through it.

Giving anger a natural status has interesting implications for how the Confucians deal with this disposition that can be destructive and antisocial. The early Confucians adopt the stance that the human being, both in terms of the corporeal body and vital energies (*qi* 氣), should be kept healthy and intact when possible as part of a more general pursuit of flourishing.¹⁴ This view is plausibly a source of inspiration for Mengzi's remarks about the need for moral cultivation to align (in some manner) with facts about human psychological constitution:

Is one able, simply by following [its nature], to make the willow tree into cups and bowls? Surely one must forcefully injure and steal from the willow tree and only then can one make cups and bowls. If one must, by forcefully injuring and stealing from the willow tree, make cups and bowls [from it], then must one also forcefully injure and steal from humans in order to make them benevolent and righteous? How swiftly, then, would all the people in the world come to regard benevolence and righteousness as calamities! (*Mengzi* 6A1, 11.1/56/17-19, bracketed text added)

Mengzi claims that any practices or methods adopted as part of the moral cultivation process should respect the integrity of the human being. If moral cultivation were to work violently against the most fundamental human dispositions, then it would inevitably do harm to humans by mutilating them at their core. Anger is among one's natural dispositions, so trying to eliminate anger would be akin to mutilating oneself. Consequently, the feeling of anger should not be eliminated, but accommodated and, at least in a sense, even nourished.¹⁵

A further upshot of this view is that anger is not inherently associated with moral badness; again, anger can be constructive and conducive to moral progress, as with the campaigns of Wen and Wu. It is important to qualify, though, that anger's place in Confucianism is complex: anger's moral valence is often dependent on things like setting and the manner in which it is exhibited. For the Confucians, whether anger is conducive or counterproductive to moral aims is a function of context. Specifically, if anger is enacted in the appropriate setting and in the appropriate way, then the overarching moral performance is good; if anger is enacted in either an inappropriate setting or inappropriate manner, then the performance is morally problematic. Consider Confucius's handling of his brash student Zilu (子路): though loyal, Zilu

is depicted as prone to aggressive displays, a trait that Zilu considered conducive to directing the military. When Zilu implies that he would be an ideal companion to serve alongside Confucius in commanding an army, however, Confucius subtly admonishes him:

One who would wrestle a tiger or gallop through a river, who would die without regret: I would not associate with such a person. The one with whom I would associate would serve cautiously, be good at strategy, and complete his tasks.

(Analects 7.11/15/17-18)

Zilu's fault lies not in his willingness to fight, but in the lack of gravity he affords violent conflict. This implies a lack of restraint analogous to what Xunzi warns against: even in cases where one might be (rightly) angered, to act without restraint or calculation is still to act poorly. It is not necessarily morally wrong to become angry; however, it can be morally wrong to act on that anger without due consideration of other morally salient features, and so the early Confucians do not license completely giving over to anger. Again, feelings of anger are an inevitability of human living, are motivating, and can even be morally appropriate, but anger should never be the *sole* basis of one's actions; moral goodness demands that one act in a way that advances personal and interpersonal flourishing, and anger can stymie this pursuit.

In order to further flesh out the nuances of anger's functionality in the Confucian account, it will help to look at the circumstances in which anger is conducive to psychological and social flourishing. For one, given that it is a basic feature of human experience, humans must be allowed displays of anger as part of maintaining personal tranquility. Xunzi states that, "if people are not permitted displays of happiness or anger, then there will be chaos" (*Xunzi* 20/99/25). If anger is "stored up," as Mengzi says, then people become more prone to violent displays; thus, it is not in the interest either of the personal or relational health of humans to be

prevented from showing anger. Accordingly, humans need outlets to express anger without disrupting relationships or the general community.

In addition to the practical necessity of anger, multiple passages list anger as a disposition that moral exemplars both possess and deploy in appropriate scenarios. Xunzi describes this facet of anger in reference to the exemplar kings of old:

Thus, it was by music that the former kings ornamented their happiness; it was by military campaigns and weaponry that the former kings ornamented their anger, and so the former kings' happiness and anger both were equally achieved. Thus, when they were happy all under heaven was at peace; when angry, the violent and chaotic were made fearful. This was the way of the former kings, and ritual and music are its zenith. (*Xunzi* 20/99/10-12)¹⁶

Along with the aforementioned passage discussing the exploits of Wen and Wu, the anger of the exemplar kings more generally is treated as a virtue unto itself, as it was deployed to both express righteous attitudes, and quell chaos and ill intent in the realm.

In particular, this feature of anger helps to manifest the additional virtue of "courage" (*yong* 勇) displayed by Wen and Wu. While an account of courage in the Confucian tradition can be provided without referencing anger, it is arguable that anger, or some form of it, is recruited into certain expressions of courage that appear in classical Confucian thought. As Shun explains:

[O]n the Confucian view, when one is wrongfully injured, the focus of one's attention should be on the ethical quality of one's response rather than on how one's standing is challenged by the offender. One may respond with anger to the ethically problematic quality of the situation...But, ideally, there should not be an additional element of the response that is directed to the way one's standing has

been challenged because, on the Confucian view, one's standing is a matter of one's own ethical qualities rather than the way one is viewed or treated by others.

(2014, 29-30)

Shun's explanation emphasizes a Confucian belief that, ideally, one's emotional and behavioral responses should focus on moving forward in life and not dwelling on how an injury challenges one's own standing. Were one to stew in or store up that anger, then one would risk becoming fixated and mired in the situation. This, in turn, increases the risk of one's otherwise moral anger devolving into base malice that could lead to ignoble action, which would exemplify mere animosity rather than courage. Confucian courage, then, can be understood in part as the harnessing of anger not for petty vengeance, but as a motivator for moral rectification.

The ability of Wen and Wu to pacify the realm in a display of anger is exemplary of such cultivation and is said by Mengzi to mark a morally "great" form of courage (*dayong* 大勇) that is distinct from "petty courage" (*xiaoyong* 小勇). Mere petty courage is concerned with maintaining exterior shows of honor (e.g., responding to insult or steeling one's will), while great courage is oriented toward maintaining and perpetuating moral goodness. Moreover, and as P. J. Ivanhoe notes, "one of the characteristic features of great courage is that those who possess it know that they are in the right and justified in their cause" (2006, 224). Ivanhoe's addition reinforces the idea that great courage links moral righteousness and the aforementioned form of anger that is focused on making good on that attitude. Indeed, such anger, in the service of courage, might even be morally requisite.

It is clear, then, that the early Confucians regard anger as playing an important role in bringing about personal flourishing and positive social transformation. Again, though, it is necessary to emphasize that this moral anger is distinct from petty and problematic cases of

anger. Furthermore, moral anger is not merely something that manifests and is to be deployed spontaneously. Rather, the anger is to be felt, directed, and deployed in manners that further the ethical and political projects. This is achieved in large part by the application of ritual forms.¹⁷

Ritualizing Anger

Before explaining how the Confucians advocate giving anger proper form, it will help to clarify the Confucian notion of ritual. While the character translated as “ritual” (*li* 禮) originally referred to sacrificial practices (e.g., to one’s ancestors), by the time it came into use by the Confucians its meaning had broadened to a number of other activities and standards (including ranks, etiquette, and general expectations in relationships).¹⁸ According to the Confucians, these rituals originated from the efforts of ancient, exemplar kings who, in the interest of promoting harmony and flourishing for the population, established and implemented the rituals so as to both provide for social order and help fulfill individual psychosocial needs.¹⁹ The claim is not that these rituals are magical, but that they provide real, meaningful ways of recruiting, coordinating, or working through various human dispositions and interactions. Confucius himself establishes a tie between this concept of ritual and an overarching ethical ideal of *ren* (仁), variously translated as “benevolence” or “humaneness” (e.g., *Analects* 3.3, 12.1). Coupled with the fact that *ren* is depicted as caring for others (*Analects* 12.22), and that such care is plausibly construed as a matter of acknowledging, taking seriously, and responding accordingly to a person’s worth,²⁰ I suggest understanding Confucian rituals as prescriptions governing the practices and standards that embody expressions of respect and related humane attitudes.²¹

Having said this, it may not be immediately clear how anger can be ritualized as part of a prosocial project: does caring for others not preclude feelings of enmity? Anyone who is or has ever been a parent or teacher is likely to respond to this question with an emphatic “no,” as those to whom care is directed can behave in ways that frustrate (and even infuriate) their caregivers. Indeed, the Confucians seem all too aware of this fact, as Mengzi indicates in his explanation for the practice of having a son’s moral education be conducted by someone other than his father:

One [who teaches] must teach what is correct. If what one teaches as correct is not carried out, then one is sure to foster anger. If one fosters anger then, contrarily, one produces animosity. [The student sees this and says,] “He teaches what is correct, yet he himself does not yet follow what is correct.” Consequently, this results in mutual animosity between father and son. When father and son have mutual animosity, the result is badness. Those of the past exchanged their sons and taught them, so that between father and son there were no admonitions about goodness; such admonitions cause estrangement, and there is no greater misfortune than estrangement [between father and son]. (*Mengzi* 4A18, 7.18/39/1-3, bracketed text added)²²

Mengzi’s explanation is interesting because it speaks not only to the inevitability of anger toward a deviant child or student, but also to the *appropriateness* of that anger. If a student, on receiving instruction, goes on to act contrarily to what is correct, then the teacher cannot but be aggrieved. According to the passage, in such cases it is not merely that the student has erred in trying to put what is correct into practice; the student has also acted without respect for the instruction.²³ This sentiment is further clarified in the *Liji* (“*Neize* 內則” passage 17), in which it is made explicit that rejection of instruction *should* move a parent to anger (although expression of said anger

should be private, not public). This is because such rejection is not only an affront to the teacher, but to the values and prescriptions encoded in the instruction. As such, the teacher's anger reflects not merely indignation, but moral righteousness since, from the Confucian perspective, the teacher has a moral obligation to instill said values and prescriptions in the student.

At the same time, the passage reflects the fact that the Confucians do not license *all* displays of anger, as even a novice is capable of discerning the inappropriateness of showing animosity. The important distinction here is that it is not anger itself that is problematic, but what anger can sometimes incite: estrangement, abuse, injury, and general badness. Hence, Xunzi counsels against a "moment's anger" in favor of restraint (*Xunzi* 4/12/21) but does *not* insist on one's living a life devoid of anger. The key is to provide the aforementioned means of guiding and accommodating anger in a way that does not provoke animosity but is conducive to moral aims. Learners must develop an ability to discern between morally destructive expressions of anger, and morally constructive expressions of anger. This is where the turn to ritual occurs.

For Xunzi, and Confucius as well, ritual is key to moral cultivation.²⁴ According to Xunzi, at birth humans lack the resources for (harmoniously) coping with and responding to a variety of hardships including emotionally disruptive scenarios, being without sufficient sustenance, and even generally interacting with others. When confronted with such circumstances, humans may deploy (and even tend toward) chaotic or ethically problematic behaviors: attacking others out of grief, stealing from others in desperation, and being generally insensitive to the wellbeing of others. By nature, Xunzi claims, humans are effectively morally incompetent. It is only by learning, practicing, and appreciating ritual that one becomes a fully realized moral person (e.g., *Xunzi* 1/3/10-11). Xunzi illustrates this with the metaphors of shaping and honing, comparing human nature to crooked wood and blunt metal, and claiming

that humans must therefore be rectified with instruction in ritual and righteousness (*Xunzi* 23/113/9–10). Ritual helps organize, coordinate, and even prime affective responses to these sorts of scenarios, restructuring a learner's psychological landscape by helping to inculcate responses to, and understandings of, a variety of ethically charged situations.

Of additional interest is ritual's ability to channel and refine dispositions to make them appropriate, tolerable, and comprehensible to oneself and others in various situations. Similar to how mastering a verbal language aids one's analysis of both the world and oneself, ritual facilitates moral development by prescribing norms that are then assimilated into one's sense of moral judgement (*Xunzi* 4/15/13–17).²⁵ Xunzi's program uses ritual to refine one's sense of judgement in a way that enhances self and social awareness when seeking to fulfill one's dispositional desires, helping to achieve harmony. When deliberating whether or how to act on a disposition, one is subject to the cultivated sense of moral judgement as framed by social ritual. Establishing these norms throughout a community via ritual sets a basis for moral order.

Accordingly, Xunzi claims that it is by ritual that proper limits and form are given to anger (19/92/5). This reflects ritual's general function: providing models for social harmony. Admittedly, Xunzi rarely explicitly connects anger and ritual, but there are several occasions where his language harkens to this connection. For example, Xunzi states that

When angry, [the noble person] is not excessively harsh... [and such a person] is not excessively harsh when angry...because adherence to the proper model overcomes any selfishness. (*Xunzi* 2/8/13-15, Hutton trans. modified, 15).

As evinced in several other passages, the models to which Xunzi refers are the rituals (e.g., *Xunzi* 1/3/7-12, 2/8/4, 12/60/10, 17/82/22-17/83/1, 19/92/16-17, 23/114/10-11). This is a common styling for Xunzi, who occasionally relates the function of ritual to other types of standards, such

as measurements and blueprints. For example, when speaking of the noble scholar, Xunzi describes such a person as one who dwells within an edifice of ritual (e.g., *Xunzi* 19/95/15, 8/34/20-24), and suggests that rituals also provide guidance as sorts of social “depth markers” (*Xunzi* 17/82/22-17/83/1). The wording depicts ritual as something that enables practitioners to move and work through both the social world and internal psychological struggles, giving helpful direction as well as shape to their thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

It is plausible, then, that Xunzi’s general treatment of ritual, with its handling of dispositions, will have implications for anger. Consider Xunzi’s remarks on the different ritual prescriptions to which one should adhere for the various dispositions: music for joy, quasi-asceticism for sorrow, and martial and corrective affairs for moral disdain.²⁶ All of these prescriptions are established both to allow the expression and full experience of the relevant disposition in a manner that signals one’s dispositional state to others, and to allow one to have the experience in a manner that maintains both social and personal harmony. Such prescriptions can also nurture and accommodate anger, as noted in Xunzi’s previous connection between anger and how the former kings “ornamented” their anger with the military practices referenced herein, as well as the idea that anger is stirred by a moral violation. It is by means of the ritual forms, then, that the experience and expression of anger is facilitated so as to make it a constructive, promoral event, rather than a merely destructive one.

Unfortunately, neither Xunzi nor any of the other early Confucians detail specific rituals for anger, at least not for those who are in positions unsuitable for commanding armies.²⁷ Rather, when detailing rituals that concern natural dispositions, Xunzi tends to focus on sorrow, especially in the case of lost loved ones. In an extended example, Xunzi goes into detail about the funeral rites for a deceased parent, discussing how one makes offerings to the deceased that

they would have required in life, but only provides items that are well worn or imperfect in some significant way (*Xunzi* 19/95/9-13). The purpose is to simultaneously express reverence for the deceased and the grief of loss while also acknowledging that person's passing and moving on accordingly.²⁸ It is plausible that similar ritual prescriptions exist for coping with and expressing anger, even if the Confucians do not detail them in depth. Anger, much like sorrow or happiness, is an unavoidable human disposition, and so it is highly unlikely (perhaps impossible) that there would not be a ritual means of handling anger.

What might such rituals look like, though? In addition to the use of reflection and calculation to pause one's anger, I suggest that rituals dealing with the aforementioned virtue of courage (*yong* 勇), especially moral courage, are among those to which the Confucians appeal for handling and expelling anger. Specifically, I submit that it is through courage that anger is mobilized for moral ends. Recall that the ideal target of anger is something like immorality or injustice, suggesting that displays of *great* (i.e., moral) courage are those directed specifically against such moral badness (e.g., as with Wen and Wu). If this is an accurate understanding of the classical Confucian position, then it provides an additional hint as to what rituals of anger might look like for even a commoner: they are displays of righteousness in the face of moral adversity and, insofar as these rituals channel anger, the anger expressed is specifically *moral* anger; it is prosocial and conducive to justice.

With this Confucian account of moral anger and ritual in hand, I turn to modernity and examine how rituals of the Confucian sort might be used to deploy anger for positive moral and political ends, particularly in terms of identifying and responding to immorality or injustice.

Accepting Anger's Place

As mentioned previously, the early Confucian texts depict properly deployed, moral anger as having a role in projects of moral and political transformation and rectification. This account fits nicely with some of the contemporary work on anger. Helena Flam (2005, 2015), for example, has written extensively on the importance of “reclaiming” anger as a necessary part of achieving positive social change against an oppressive status quo. Additionally, Dirk Lindebaum and colleagues have argued for a kind of “moral anger” that stands distinct from other forms of anger, depicting this disposition as

(i) an aroused emotional state stemming from (ii) a primary appraisal of a moral standard violation that (iii) impacts others more than oneself, and (iv) motivates corrective behaviour intended to improve the social condition, even in the face of significant personal risk. (Lindebaum and Geddes 2015, 6)

Moral anger has two dimensions, one informative and the other energetic. Moral anger is informative in the sense that it provides a source of appraisal, particularly with regard to the ethical nature of a scenario; it is energetic in the sense that it moves one to act against an ethical breach (Lindebaum and Gabriel 2016, 904-905). Such features of moral anger clearly resonate with the Confucian depictions of kings Wen and Wu, whose actions are part of a broader narrative of rulers who work toward ethical-political rectification when they, infuriated by the maltreatment of their people by an uncaring authority, depose a tyrant and establish a kingdom on benevolent principles. This resonance further suggests that classical Confucian thought on moral anger is of interest even in modernity, particularly when considering *how* such anger can

be harnessed through ritual forms to achieve ethical and political transformation that aims at personal flourishing and social harmony.

I suspect that some readers will be wary of such a project: the idea that any social form (ritual or otherwise) could successfully allow one to experience, express, or work through one's anger without disrupting harmony may seem laughable. After all, expressions of anger, even nonviolent ones, can serve as gateways to more problematic attitudes, such as Martha Nussbaum's (2016) "payback" wish, which inclines its holders to exact some sort of vengeance on those who have wronged them. This retributive desire is morally problematic in its demand that, in order for one's anger (inclusive of any moral aims) to be effectively expressed and appeased, one must necessarily do injury to others. If one must do injury to others in order to fully express one's anger, however, then it seems unlikely that the anger's expression can be compatible with the aim of social harmony.

Moreover, there is a live concern that anger can trap its holders in a cycle: when anger results in action that does injury to others, then those others become aggrieved and respond in kind; the circle then perpetuates itself. This is made all the worse by the fact that anger motivates not only individually, but communally, and all those members of a group infected with anger become less receptive to those outside the group. Deborah Cantrell (2019) seizes on this fault to argue against the use of anger as a moral motivator, claiming

that anger, at its core, is destructive and unhelpful...its goal is to inflict some kind of "payback" on another, which orients responsive action towards the past and not towards change going forward. (5)

The cycle of anger can be regressive for the individual, trapping them in a state of feeling wronged and seeking retribution without offering any real means of moving forward even if such

retribution is achieved. While it is right to call out injustice, which does not necessarily require a feeling of anger, it is not helpful to engage with attitudes that only serve to further disintegrate the threads of communality. Hence, anger looks to be incompatible with social harmony.

On the one hand, I am sympathetic to the concern that anger can be misplaced and destructive, even when the avowed sources and directions of the anger are morally oriented. For example, and as Cantrell aptly notes, violent protest, even if the cause is righteous, can alienate possible supporters (*Ibid.*), so one must be wary of anger. On the other hand, this line of thinking seems to minimize the fact that anger does admit of genres,²⁹ and that developing an ability to discriminate among these genres is part of moral cultivation. Moreover, it is possible that many of the most problematic cases typically referred to as “anger” are, in fact, misidentified instances of what the Confucians might call “rage” (e.g., hurling a brick through a window during a tense demonstration). Distinctions must be drawn between mere frustration, reflexive tantrums, and genuine moral outrage. This is a core feature of the overarching Confucian program which, as part of its ethical project, urges learners *not* to become stuck or fixated in their anger, but to move through (or with) it in a manner that is forward-looking and morally productive.

A similar issue surrounds resentment (*yuan* 怨) which, in the Confucian tradition, is a kind of frustration with one’s circumstances that is phenomenologically similar to, though not necessarily the same as, anger (Ing 2016, p. 19; Sung forthcoming).³⁰ While resentment is generally discouraged by the early Confucians,³¹ likely be due to the fact that it can inhibit prosociality by breeding contention between persons, it is not rejected outright. Winnie Sung argues (plausibly) that it is best to understand the Confucian position on resentment as permitting the experience of resentment while rejecting any *clinging* to said resentment, as this can prohibit one from flourishing or from contributing to the flourishing of others.³² Moreover, resentment is

apparently endorsed when it is morally proper. Sung offers the example of Mengzi's critiquing an officer who lacked resentment following his mistreatment by an unrighteous lord, a fault that Sung depicts as a lack of seriousness and that Mengzi refers to as a lack of (self-)respect (*gong 恭*) (*Mengzi* 2A9, 3.9/18/29-30). Mengzi's remarks reflect a general Confucian sentiment that, while ministers should demonstrate loyalty to their superiors, such loyalty cannot consist in mere toadying: when one witnesses or experiences impropriety, one ought to offer remonstrance. His remarks also reflect the impression that resentment, at least in this case, provides a litmus test for one's own moral understanding: if one is treated genuinely morally badly, then one *ought* to feel resentment, since the feeling of frustration indicates that something is ethically amiss.³³

Accordingly, while reducing resentment toward others is a general aim of the Confucian program, resentment is also construed as a feeling appropriate to certain circumstances when deployed righteously and in moderation.³⁴ Anger, I suggest, has a similar function: generally, it is not ideal to hold anger against other humans, since it can devolve into more malicious attitudes. There are, however, circumstances in which it is both right and reasonable that one develops and expresses moral anger, such as when morality is breached. If this understanding is apt, then anger should be accorded a place as a judgemental disposition, even if it is not the sole or guiding one. The dangers of anger should not be construed as reasons to abandon anger itself; they are simply obstacles of which to be wary during moral cultivation.

Furthermore, Cantrell's suggestion that anger be rejected as a motivator for things like positive social change seems to run up against one of the core points of the Confucian project, namely that anger is a human disposition that needs to be accommodated. To clarify, Cantrell's point is not that humans should not feel anger, but that humans should not look to anger as a primary motivator for things like social activism given its caustic nature. Nonetheless, I think

that Cantrell's strategy of replacing anger-as-motivator with other emotions, namely "fierce love" (2019, 30),³⁵ is insufficient to handle the fact that most humans are prone to anger as a primary response to perceived injustice: simply because a different disposition is more prone to eliciting promoral results does not mean that anger has been overcome or expelled. Even if one were to adopt a more typically prosocial disposition, one will still need to have a means of structuring and handling anger when it arises. Such is the function of ritual.

Moving Forward with Anger and Ritualized Righteousness

What is left now is the matter of outlining rituals that can both promote sociomoral harmony and satisfy the disposition of moral anger.³⁶ Recall that there are at least two forms of anger: destructive anger and constructive/moral anger. Destructive anger is, in a sense, untethered: stewing in it, it boils over, and can erupt as morally problematic animus. Such anger is destructive, so it should either be harnessed for constructive ends or, failing that, moved through effectively and peaceably. For anger of this sort, the Confucians recommend engaging specifically in reflection (*si* 思) as part of ritual (e.g., *Xunzi* 22/110/17–18). Reflection involves a number of cognitive and metacognitive capacities, including contemplation, deliberation, reminiscence, and even visualization. Reflection demands that one halt one's action and engage in circumspection that includes the nature of the perceived injury and what sort of response is warranted. Again, and as noted earlier, this response should be forward-looking and should help to move one away from a static focus on injury. In so doing, one's anger is (ideally) quelled at least to the degree that it prevents violence, thus ending the destructive threat.

Moral anger, however, will not be pacified simply by reflection, since one discerns that a genuine moral wrong has been committed. How ought one work with such a disposition? There are, I think, obvious ways of using ritual simply to help negotiate and dispense with anger via participation in an activity that allows one to either move through or convert one's anger into another disposition. Informally, this is sometimes pursued by doing things like vigorous exercise: running, weightlifting, and sparring are all instances where both reflexive and moral anger can be allowed to burn until one attains a calmer mind. This by no means entails that one relinquishes one's sense that moral wrongdoing has occurred and needs to be addressed, but it provides time to focus and transmute anger, and possibly move away from more violent urges. As Xunzi notes, such rituals are not only proper outlets for one's dispositions, but also morally appropriate in their conduciveness to prosocial ends.³⁷ For grief, one might engage in ritual wailing, fasting, or seclusion among other practices that allow one to live through the disruptive experience. It is probable that anger can be handled in a similar manner: exclamations, vigorous physical displays, and temporarily distancing oneself from others can all help with working through the bodily aspects of experiencing anger.

Perhaps a more formal, ritualized practice that could serve moral anger is the writing, but not sending, of angry, condemnatory letters.³⁸ Maria Konnikova documents several famous examples of such "hot letters":

Harry S. Truman once almost informed the treasurer of the United States that "I don't think that the financial advisor of God Himself would be able to understand what the financial position of the Government of the United States is, by reading your statement." In 1922, Winston Churchill nearly warned Prime Minister David Lloyd George that when it came to Iraq, "we are paying eight millions a year for

the privilege of living on an ungrateful volcano out of which we are in no circumstances to get anything worth having.” Mark Twain all but chastised Russians for being too passive when it came to the czar’s abuses, writing, “Apparently none of them can bear to think of losing the present hell entirely, they merely want the temperature cooled down a little.” (2014)

To clarify, the hot letter is not merely a case of one rapidly penning a note and then crumpling it up and tossing it away (else there would not be treasure troves of unsent missives). One actually sits down to compose a formal letter in which one fully and unequivocally expresses one’s thoughts and feelings on the source of moral outrage. In so doing, one becomes creatively, intellectually engaged with one’s anger, and possibly facilitates a shift away from rage.

The practice and effects of hot letter writing are comparable to the way in which one uses ritual sacrifices and offerings to the deceased to work through sorrow: just as one knows (intellectually) that the offerings will not actually be used by the deceased, it brings one a sense of fulfillment all the same; similarly, simply writing the letter may be sufficient to express and work through the brunt of one’s moral outrage. As one allows the excess of energy generated by one’s anger to dissipate, one is left bodily calmer and less distracted by the immediate sensation of the metaphorical fire in one’s belly. This allows one to turn one’s attention fully to the intellectual aspect of one’s moral anger and proceed accordingly.

There are also several ways in which ritual can help to navigate and actively deploy moral anger for the purpose of moral rectification, even for those unable to deploy militaries to pacify (and correct) the unrighteous; that is to say, ritual forms can be applied to harness one’s moral anger and more directly address wrongdoing. Both the *Analects* (14.21/39/6-11) and the *Liji* (“*Neize*” passage 18), for example, depict cases of remonstrating with authority figures when

one thinks morality has been upended: it is to be done respectfully, even reverentially, but if one encounters wrongdoing, then there is both reason and protocol to make clear one's concerns.³⁹ In modernity, this might take the form of structured disputation or some sort of reconciliatory practice. Even if such interactions fail to result in immediate transformation, it is still better to express the anger and make the problem known than to sit by and do nothing, which could allow the transgression to persist or for one's own anger to possibly fester and revert to reflexive, destructive anger.

A practice that could benefit from (or coopt) such ritual treatments of anger is the modern Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). TRCs are typically developed and deployed for the purpose of creating historical accounts of, and assisting in the healing process for, those affected by widespread or national atrocities (e.g., Apartheid in South Africa or the Residential Schools Settlement Agreement in Canada), and for promoting reconciliation between involved parties.⁴⁰ TRCs offer an opportunity for reparative or restorative justice, as opposed to retributive approaches to justice that may engender further conflict among parties. As such, TRCs are increasingly popular and have been touted as active and effective contributors both to reconciling and unifying society generally, as well as to democratization specifically (e.g., Gibson 2006).

In some ways, TRCs are already ritualized spaces, offering a variety of practices and settings that are made sacred by the prescriptions placed on what is to be shared and how. Citing the description of the Canadian TRCs, Anne-Marie Reynaud reports the following instructions:

Survivors or intergenerational victims are to speak of their residential school experiences and their impacts, or of reconciliation. They should try to respect the 15-minute time frame. There is available health support for all. The tears witnesses "shed without shame" are healing...and not garbage. Therefore, the

tissues people use are not to be thrown away but collected and burnt in the sacred fire. She reminded the audience that this room is a witness of sacred sharings...and that the TRC is independent from the government. It is necessary, she also said, not to name an aggressor if this person has not been to court or if they are not dead. (2014, 374)

This approach to constructing the space of the TRC employs the sorts of prescriptions that would be considered ritual on the Confucian account: they delineate roles and responsibilities, cover specific practices and rules of decorum, and aim at establishing and preserving respect.

Despite the appeal of TRCs, however, their actual efficacy in helping victims recover from their traumas remains unclear. In particular, while TRCs arguably provide a space in which to work toward reconciliation between victim and victimizer, it is not obvious that these spaces truly or fully accommodate the particular material or emotional needs of those who have been victimized, including their anger. In fact, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, architect of the TRCs in South Africa, effectively condemns the presence of anger in such spaces, claiming that

Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good [of reconciliation] is to be avoided like the plague. Anger, resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive of this good (1999, 34).

This construal and treatment of victims' anger is problematic for a number of reasons. First, and most obviously, it makes fully speaking truth difficult for victims who carry anger. These victims are prohibited from displaying, understanding, or validating their full range of emotions when restrictions are placed not only on what they are allowed say, but how they are allowed to say it. If anger is indeed caustic, as is suggested by scholars like Cantrell, Nussbaum, and Tutu, then it is best to alleviate this burden, rather than suppress it and thereby saddle the victims with

additional pressure. Moreover, there is no evidence to date that TRCs effectively purge this feeling anyway (e.g., Flam 2013, Mendeloff 2009, Reynaud 2014). Consequently, even when TRCs are ritualized, it is not clear that they are presently effective rituals, at least insofar as their aim is to assist in healing and anger is indicative of injury.

Second, such construals assume that anger is necessarily divisive and caustic, and such a characterization ignores the fact that anger may vary in genre. Anger does not have to be destructive or divisive; it can, as I have argued throughout this essay, also be conducive to moral projects.⁴¹ Indeed, in her interviews with survivors who attended the Canadian TRCs, Reynaud notes that, although the events did little to alleviate their anger, none of the victims expressed anything akin to Nussbaum's payback wish (378), and some even refused to relinquish their anger on the grounds that it was part of both their personal healing process as well as the way forward in terms of eliminating systemic injustices (376). This is more in line with the moral anger that I have attributed to the Confucians: it is an anger that arises in response to moral transgressions and moves one to seek rectification or transformation of those individuals or systems responsible. As such, the moral anger depicted herein need not be construed as retributive or at odds with reparative/restorative justice. On the contrary, its aims are reparative/restorative, as the ethical-political project is pro-, rather than anti-, social.

My suggestion, then, is that TRCs can benefit from maintaining their ritualized atmosphere, but ought to alter the rituals (or provide additional rituals) such that they embrace anger and empower victims, rather than aim to snuff out their fire. This means that the ritual space of the TRC must be carefully constructed such that the ritual forms on offer simultaneously maintain an atmosphere of respect without invalidating the emotions of those offering testimony. For example, in the ritual of deposition it may help to emphasize that not

only are speakers' words valued, but that their tone and nonverbal expressions are also valued by those in attendance; this must be so regardless of the nature of the emotion behind the expression, since that emotion is equally part of their testimony, their truth. Consequently, it would be wrong to censure those who express anger, especially since such expressions often reflect the very sort of distress that indicates an obstacle to reconciliation.

More effectively ritualizing TRCs also means being highly sensitive to the particular needs of those who would give testimony. Continuing with the example of the Canadian TRCs, Reynaud notes that the event, held at the Queen Mary Hotel in Montreal, was perceived as deeply problematic due to the Crown's role in perpetuating the target injustice, as well as the irony of sealing a "ritual" box containing written testimonials that had been "boxed-in" for so long (p. 378). Although the event and the ritual were both well-intentioned, they overlooked crucial features of the interaction between symbols (the name of the hotel and the sealing of the box) with the nature of the injustice (the government-sanctioned abuse of aboriginal peoples and the invalidation of their anguish). Following the Confucian guidelines, the ritual space should be selected or designed such that the space "fits" the circumstances, including the attitudes of those who have been injured. Additionally, any particular rituals that are incorporated into the TRC should be devised with an awareness of power dynamics; they should aim to maximally empower victims so that they are able to more effectively harness and express their full truths (again, inclusive of emotions like anger) and to avoid diminishing victims or their feelings. Such rituals can assist in harnessing anger and working directly toward its aim of moral rectification.

There are also less institutional ways of ritualizing moral anger that carry their own nuances. The Confucians, for example, tend to disparage the use of overt insults in direct confrontation with wrongdoers, but they do not shy away from expressing strong disapproval of

wrongdoing by appeal to historical analogs. In several passages (e.g., *Analects* 3.1, 3.2), Confucius comments on the behaviors of the three great ministerial families in his home state who, in their hubris, carry on as if they carry the authority of not only dukes, but kings. When doing so, he does not engage in mere name-calling, but by identifying specific practices and alluding to how they, culturally or historically, reflect breaches of propriety. In other words, the wrongdoing is set specifically within the context of ritual or, perhaps more accurately, its transgression; it is a subtle “call-out” on wrongdoing. The philosophy behind such an approach is similar to Karen Stohr’s (2006) account of the manner in which etiquette functions as the primary vehicle by which moral sentiments and attitudes are expressed. According to Stohr, there is a very real sense in which being a moral person requires one to understand and adopt social conventions as part of the expression and exchange of moral sentiments. This is not to suggest that morality is simply conventionalism: rather, as Stohr points out, “the conventions are the starting point.... The thought may be what counts, but the vehicle for expressing it is itself part of the thought” (195). These etiquette conventions, then, are integral to proper moral practice and serve an important role in coordinating affect and action.

An approach of effectively calling out breaches of propriety/ritual thus reflects the aforementioned informative aspect of moral anger on two levels. On the one hand, appeal to ritual can enable expression of one’s own moral outrage; on the other, it can reflect the thought that there is a sociohistorical explanation for why one is morally outraged and makes this explanation public. This is an interesting tactic for expressing moral anger, as it places the object(s) of anger in an interesting position: if they are to (meaningfully) respond to the challenge, then they must do so by addressing the explanation, which requires a more substantive and intellectual line of thought and communication. Consequently, by utilizing this mode of

expression, one can effectively ‘raise the level of discourse’ and possibly come closer to invoking the target moral or social change, as it forces the parties involved to reflect.⁴²

A last way in which ritual can accommodate moral anger is simply to strive to embody and express the moral ideal that has been affronted. In so doing, one is able to both respond to the source of the immorality, injustice, or general moral transgression as well as productively work through the anger felt. Moreover, one is able to actively work toward setting right the situation through one’s own agency, as actively being a morally good person requires one to act against immorality or injustice. To achieve this, from the Confucian perspective, requires that one exemplify ritual performance in general. This is because, according to the Confucians, sincere ritual practice simply does embody and express moral righteousness (e.g., *Analects* 15.18/43/11; *Xunzi* 19/93/23-19/94/1, 19/94/8). If moral anger motivates one to work toward moral rectification, then certainly this is the best way to achieve that end while exercising one’s anger. In this way, one goes on to perform an analogue of what the exemplar kings themselves did, displaying anger through a courageous righteousness.

Are there modern examples of ritual being used in such a manner? An interesting case is made by David Kertzer that certain funeral rituals in South Africa can be construed as expressions of moral outrage against Apartheid. Detailing one such event, Kertzer writes:

On April 13 [1985] ...a mass funeral was held for twenty-seven blacks—many of them youths—killed by police. Most of the victims had been killed when police opened fire on mourners who had gathered for a previous funeral. The sixty thousand participants in the rite... “mixed solemnity with politics, mourning with exhortation and clenched fists with the soft swelling of African singing.” The

coffins were draped in the black, green, and gold colors of the outlawed African National Congress. Emotions ran high. (Kertzer 1988, 171)

This ritual was not merely for the purgation of grief and impotent outrage, nor was it simply to offer condolence or remembrance. The ritual cultivated the moral anger of the people and transformed it into action. As Kertzer goes on to note, the mass funeral allowed the people to not only unify in their anger, but to demonstrate a shared identity and the possibility of a new national leadership (*Ibid.*, 172). In other words, the mass funeral served as more than just an expression of moral anger, but the application of that anger to help launch genuine opposition to their oppressors. This exemplifies the harnessing of moral anger into ritual and then using said ritual for (or toward) the enactment of positive moral change.⁴³

To reiterate, the Confucians regard anger as one of the most difficult dispositions that humans possess, and one that can easily be turned to violent, immoral ends. At the same time, being a natural disposition means that anger warrants care and attention and, moreover, can even be coopted in the service of attaining the moral ends toward which the person of noble character aims. As I have shown, one way of achieving moral aims through anger is to make use of ritual prescriptions to both express and work through one's anger, as well as harness that anger for the purpose of positive moral and sociopolitical change.

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Notes

¹ It is noteworthy that, for the Confucians, even what are often thought of as positive dispositions (e.g., joy, affection, and happiness) can become disruptive in terms of how they influence or distort judgement, behavior, and relationships. Rather than attempt to cut off such feelings, however, the Confucians argue that it is better to find means of accommodating them, placing the Confucians in interesting opposition to (among others) the Stoics, who begin with similar premises and yet reached different conclusions.

² There is a concern about cross-cultural (and cross-temporal) identification of emotions. To clarify, I am not assuming that *nu* is necessarily equivalent to what most readers will construe as anger. Rather, I offer up an interpretation of the Confucian notion of anger, its treatment in the

literature, and how both the concept and its enactment bear on contemporary ethical issues.

Similar considerations apply to all other emotions/feelings discussed herein.

³ ICS concordance numbers are used where possible for all citations from classical Chinese texts. Conventional passage numbers are also provided for the *Mengzi*. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated, and I am thankful to Eric Hutton for a number of important corrections.

⁴ Mengzi's admonitions here, and others like them, are congruent with the valuation of familial relationships that is notably prominent in Confucianism. Early in the *Analects*, for example, filial piety is listed as the root of benevolence (1.2/1/6-7). For concerns about how family can be jeopardized by anger, see *Analects* 12.21/33/1-3.

⁵ Xunzi additionally idealizes ministers and generals who are unable to be provoked by anger (*Xunzi* 15/71/4).

⁶ See, for example, *Analects* 12.1/30/17: "Restraining oneself and according with ritual propriety constitutes humaneness." I will elaborate on the role of ritual in moral goodness later in this essay.

⁷ Scholars familiar with the work of Mengzi may object that the thinker does not depict anger as being a key feature or "sprout" of human nature. While this may muddy anger's place in Mengzi's philosophy, he still seems to regard anger as a feeling that can and does occur naturally, and so I will not treat him as an outlier among early Confucian thought on the topic.

⁸ Discussion with Joonho Lee was most helpful in formulating this distinction.

⁹ For a recent review and critique of scholars advancing such interpretations, see Zhang 2015.

¹⁰ A quick note: throughout the text I occasionally make mention of "righteous" attitudes, but I opt to depict anger as "moral anger" or "promoral anger" rather than necessarily as righteous anger. I do this to avoid (as much as possible) conflation of moral anger with the concept and

disposition of righteousness (*yi* 義) often referenced in Confucian texts. While I suspect that moral(ized) anger and *yi* at least *can* fit together in the classical Confucian context, and perhaps often do, they are not depicted as practically or logically equivalent or entailing one another. As such, I err on the side of caution with my diction. I am appreciative of Andrew Ruble for helping me to explain this point.

¹¹ Consequently, it is arguable that the Confucian notion of harmony, at least as I understand it here, is not a state devoid of what we might think of as disruptive feelings; rather, it involves the appropriate channeling and application of these feelings so that they do not become disruptive or result in disruptive behavior or action. My thanks to Eirik Harris for pressing me on this issue.

¹² For example, Xunzi's list of natural dispositions includes liking (*hao* 好), disgust (*wu* 惡), joy (*xi* 喜), anger (*nu* 怒), sorrow (*ai* 哀), and happiness (*le* 樂) (*Xunzi* 22/107/23).

¹³ Interested scholars may also attend to the “*Liyun*” chapter of the *Liji*, which provides an elaboration of the so-called “seven feelings” (*qi qing* 七情) for later Confucian thought. This list notably includes anger (*nu*) alongside joy (*xi* 喜), sadness (*ai* 哀), fear (*ju* 懼), love (*ai* 愛), aversion (*wu* 惡), and desire (*yu* 欲).

¹⁴ This seems to have been an ancient mode of thought and one that the Confucians often associated with both filial piety (*xiao* 孝) and a more general notion of personal flourishing. See, for example, *Analects* 2.6/3/9.

¹⁵ Though not at the expense of moral values or commitments (e.g., *Mengzi* 6A14, 11.14/60/14-19)

¹⁶ A similar remark appears in the *Liji* (“*Yueji* 樂記” passage 49)

¹⁷ To clarify, I am focusing exclusively on the Confucian appeal to ritual in this project as a way of engaging with anger in a moral manner. This is not to suggest that the Confucians looked at ritual as the only resource by which anger could be coopted for moral ends, though (e.g., Mengzi makes a number of remarks about how humans have promoral core dispositions that can be used to rein in feelings like anger, and Xunzi suggests that a sense of approbation, once tutored, can also help to appropriately guide motivating feelings like anger). My thanks to Gordon Mower for recommending this addition.

¹⁸ See, for example, *Xunzi* 10/43/1-3: In ritual, noble and lowly are ranked, old and young are differentiated, poor and rich, casual and grave, all of these are distinguished... Virtue must be accorded position, position must be accorded prosperity, and prosperity must be accorded use.

¹⁹ See in particular *Xunzi* Book 19, “On Ritual” (*Lilun* 禮論).

²⁰ I here draw from Sin-ye Chan’s (2006) interpretation of the related concept of respect (*jing* 敬) in Confucianism.

²¹ For first use of this description, see Lewis 2018. For an extended defense of this reading, see Lewis forthcoming.

²² A similar sentiment appears in *Analects* 16.13/47/3-9.

²³ Of course, this may be unintentional, but the implication seems to be that a teacher’s frustration with such cases is inevitable and that this can set a foundation for anger.

²⁴ Mengzi says relatively little on the topic of ritual education.

²⁵ Bockover 2012, Lewis forthcoming, Li 2007, and Nam 2014 also employ analogies between language and ritual.

²⁶ *Xunzi* 19/98/3-7, Hutton trans., p. 215.

²⁷ The *Liji*, for example, details directions for coordinating the military with anger (e.g., *Qu Li Shang*, passage 69).

²⁸ Of particular note are Xunzi's remarks on the rites of mourning and sacrifice detailed in *Xunzi* 19/95/17-18 and *Xunzi* 19/97/20-19/98/3.

²⁹ Cantrell notes that James Jasper's (2011) work on emotion includes a "taxonomy" of anger that distinguishes moral anger from destructive, reflexive anger (Cantrell 2019, pp. 11-12). Cantrell ultimately concludes, however, that "anger is caustic and too often brings about change that requires one group to benefit at the intentional expense of another group" (*Ibid*, p. 33) and that it is therefore unsafe as a resource.

³⁰ Michael Ing suggests that resentment is a form of anger; Winnie Sung argues that the two are conceptually distinct.

³¹ Ing here cites Xunzi: "Those who understand themselves do not resent others. Those who understand their lot in life do not resent *tian* (heaven)" (*Xunzi* 4/13/19; cited in Ing 2016, p. 20).

³² Sung interprets the Confucians as claiming that, when one is resentful, one objectifies oneself into a passive stance and become fixated, preventing one from realizing genuine benevolence and moral propriety. The early Confucians do criticize fixation and caution learners against becoming "stuck," so to speak, so Sung's interpretation is plausible, though it may not be the primary or exclusive rationale behind the general discomfort with resentment.

³³ Ing offers a more specific instance of appropriate resentment, suggesting that it applies in cases where "those close to us take advantage of the vulnerability necessary for entering into meaningful relationships rooted in care" (2016, 24) and citing the appropriateness of resentment toward family who commit serious grievances detailed in *Mengzi* 6B3 (12.3/62/25-12.3/63/8).

That is to say, resentment is appropriate when care, in some form, is withheld by those one considers intimately close; it is effectively a response to a special kind of betrayal.

³⁴ Hagop Sarkissian (forthcoming) offers a similar analysis of the role of contempt (*wu* 惡) in Confucianism. Like resentment, contempt is undesirable due to its propensity for generating antisocial inclinations, but it also serves an important role in detecting and rectifying moral wrongs (e.g., *Analects* 4.3/7/9: “Only one who is humane is [truly] able to love people, is [truly] able to despise people”).

³⁵ Cantrell’s characterization of “fierce love” is not entirely precise, but suggests that one ties a sense of ferocity (perhaps referring to a particular motive force) not to anger, which is injury-oriented, but to love, which is unity- and dignity-oriented, and is committed to a proposition that “none in humanity rises until all rise” (2019, p. 26).

³⁶ Again, and reiterating my earlier note, this is not to suggest that the ancient Confucians necessarily had the same notion of anger as, say, persons living in the contemporary United States of America. Rather, my point is that this notion of anger is at least relevantly similar to more proximate treatments of anger, and that the Confucian ritual method for the promoral enactment of anger may be (and likely is) translatable into current circumstances.

³⁷ See again *Xunzi* 19/97/20-19/98/3.

³⁸ My thanks to Joshua de Bonilla for this example.

³⁹ Similarly, one is encouraged to remonstrate with friends in error as well (*Analects* 12.23/33/15). One is also advised, however, to give up the attempt if the friend refuses advice, lest one be dragged down with them.

⁴⁰ See, for example, the depiction of TRC aims at <https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/> and <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/faqs-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-1.699883>.

⁴¹ For further argumentation for this point, Paul Muldoon (2008) provides an excellent (and recent) elaboration.

⁴² Of course, it is possible that this approach could just as easily result in further entrenchment in the problematic position(s) that have given rise to conflict. The Confucians traditionally would have advocated a more comprehensive moral education to ameliorate this sort of worry, but I acknowledge that, in modernity, there may not be available recourse to such a resource. Then again, my argument was never that such means are foolproof, and I suspect that it is preferable to offer *some* means of handling moral anger than no means at all.

⁴³ As Nalei Chen has pointed out to me, this also raises a number of interesting questions about expressions of anger and political power dynamics, such as how governments ought to respond to the anger of their citizens (e.g., as expressed by protest) and how a ritualized structure might help to facilitate progressive dialogue between government and citizenry in such cases. While I do not have the space to explore such cases here, I hope to do so in future projects.