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Introduction

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Introduction: Contempt, ancient and modern

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Douglas Cairns

Abstract:

An introduction to a collection of 9 papers on contempt, bringing contemporary philosophical approaches to the phenomenon into relation with its construction and presentation in the four classical cultures of China, Greece, India, and Rome. The introduction offers a brief summary of the papers and places the issues that they explore in the wider research context of the historical and cross-cultural study of emotion.

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I have no conflicts of interests to disclose.

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Introduction: Contempt, ancient and modern

The papers in this special issue derive from a workshop of the same title held at the Technische Universität Dresden on 24 and 25 March 2022. The event was funded by the award of an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Anneliese Maier Research Prize to support research – particularly from interdisciplinary perspectives – on ancient Greek and Roman emotion. But it also represented the convergence of a number of other research projects: (a) the Dresden Collaborative Research Centre on *Invektivität* (SFB 1285, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft), with its focus on 'dynamics of disparagement'; (b) the University of Edinburgh European Research Council Advanced Grant project on Honour in Classical Greece (ADG 74108, http://research.shca.ed.ac.uk/honour-in-greece/); and (c) ongoing collaboration between myself, Curie Virág, Maria Heim, and Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad on the conceptualization and representation of emotion in the three Classical cultures of China, Greece, and India (now bearing fruit in publications such as Cairns and Virág 2023). We thank the Humboldt Foundation for the award of the prize which made the workshop possible; the ERC (ADG 74108) for supporting the research of several of its participants (especially Cairns, Mantzouranis, and Rocchi in this special section); SFB 1285 for welcoming our collaboration; and our Dresden colleagues Antje Junghanß, Bernhard Kaiser, Georg Imgraben, and Dennis Pausch (now Marburg) for all their help in making the workshop a huge success.

Contempt is of central interest in these projects as the frequent antithesis of the respect and recognition that underpin good social relations, but also in certain circumstances a way of policing community-endorsed standards of behaviour. Contempt matters because esteem, recognition, and the respect of one's peers matter. And these matter *everywhere.* The Edinburgh Honour project starts from the premiss that the ancient Greek concept that is its

focus (Greek *timê*, a term whose root meaning is something like 'value') reflects the fundamental importance of mutual recognition and the pursuit of esteem as mechanisms that inform the dynamics of social interaction and are crucial to the development and performance of social identity. The project takes its inspiration from a number of sources – contemporary psychological approaches to intersubjectivity (as summarized and discussed extensively in e.g. Tomasello 2019 or Gallagher 2020); classic sociological accounts of social interaction, social identity, and the performance of social roles (Goffman 1967; Bourdieu 1977; Origgi 2018); and philosophical traditions on (mutual) respect and recognition from Smith and Hegel to Axel Honneth (see in particular Honneth 1995). Another significant influence has been the work of Stephen Darwall, in particular his seminal article on 'Two kinds of respect' (Darwall 1977) and its development in a series of major explorations of what Darwall calls the 'second-person standpoint' (Darwall 2006, 2013a, 2013b), defined as 'the perspective you and I take up when we make and acknowledge claims on one another's conduct and will" (Darwall 2006, p. 3). This is a perspective that – we would argue – arises from the earliest beginnings of primary and secondary intersubjectivity that inform human capacities for other-understanding and social cognition (again see Honneth 1995, Tomasello 2019, Gallagher 2020; and cf. Isern-Mas and Gomila 2020).

The pursuit of social validation, recognition, or respect is, of course, multiply and variously inflected in different social contexts and cultures, yet claims to recognition and the dynamics of their acceptance or rejection are fundamental to human sociality and widely recognized as basic to human interaction. Many will think of Adam Smith on human beings' natural desire not only to receive but also to be worthy of the approbation of their fellows (Smith [1790] 1976, III.2, pp. 113–34; cf. I.iii.3.2, p. 62, VII.ii.2.13, pp. 298–9). The fundamental insight, however, is present in Aristotle. In the first book of his *Nicomachean Ethics* (1.5, 1095b22–

31; cf. 4.3, 1123b35, 8.14, 1163b3–4), Aristotle rejects the claims of honour (*timê*) as the ultimate goal of human existence, but recognizes that it may be, in some sense, the end at which human beings aim in so far as they are members of a political community. Though the honour that members of a community pursue is in one way an external good that depends on the judgements of others, people seek that good not merely in order to bask in the approval of their fellows, but to have their own view of themselves as good people confirmed by those whose judgement they trust. Thus living together with others in a political community is not just about cultivating a good reputation, but also a matter of living up to the standards by which people hold each other mutually to account.

Aristotle was not the first to articulate these views. An earlier (fifth- or fourth-century BCE) author, name unknown, whose work is preserved in a third- or fourth-century CE treatise by the Neoplatonist philosopher, Iamblichus, insists that the trust that is essential for successful co-operation in a well-ordered community is created and fostered largely by reputation (*doxa*), and that a reliable reputation as a possessor of the qualities that one's fellow citizens value can be developed and sustained only if one does, in fact, consistently manifest those qualities (Anonymus Iamblichi, especially fragments 2, 4, and 7: see Musti and Mari 2003, Ciriaci 2011). As in Aristotle, people are said to value reputation not for its own sake, but in order that the qualities whose possession they themselves value should be recognized and valued by others. Just as trust involves accepting that others are as they seem to be (2.4), so the pursuit of reputation involves a desire to be recognized as the person one aspires to be (2.1). Reputation is not something you can simply put on, like a garment. It is reliably achieved only by manifesting the qualities that it recognizes (4.6). For the anonymous author, as for Adam Smith, we want to be praiseworthy, rather than merely praised; respectable as

well as respected. And as in Aristotle, being what we seem to be is a matter of manifesting the qualities that are valued both by ourselves and by our community.

In fact, there is no stage of Greek society of which the same could not be said. In two key passages of the *Iliad*, the earliest work of ancient Greek literature, the Trojan hero Hector expresses a form of prospective shame that certainly does focus on the negative evaluations of others, but still encompasses a pronounced sense that the standards by which he will be judged are those by which he judges himself (*Iliad* 6.440–6, 22.99–110). This may surprise those who have heard that ancient Greek societies – in general or at least in their earlier, pre-classical stages (as argued by Dodds 1951, ch. 2) – were supposed to be paradigmatic shame-cultures, cultures which, in the classic formulation of Ruth Benedict (1946, p. 223), 'rely on external sanctions for good behavior, not … an internalized conviction of sin'. Though the shame-culture/guilt-culture antithesis has been – in my view – decisively challenged (Cairns 1993; cf. Williams 1993), variants of it resurface periodically under assumed names, such as the alleged distinction between 'honour societies' and 'dignity societies' discussed by Novin and Oyserman: 'In "honor" societies, what others think matters and vigilant attention to the possibility of losing face or losing respect is necessary.... In "dignity" societies, others are de-emphasized and what matters is one's own norms, values, and beliefs' (Novin and Oyserman 2016, p. 2; for similar views of 'honour' and the societies that are characterized by it, cf. Wyatt-Brown 1982; Nisbet and Cohen 1990; Bowman 2006; Sapolsky 2018, pp. 282–91)

An oddity of these views is the failure to recognize that respecting others, and therefore accepting norms of co-operative behaviour, is as much a requirement of honour as is anger or resentment when respect is withheld. There is no question of dividing whole cultures or even

sub-cultures into those that case about honour and those that do not (see e.g. Cairns 2011, with the works cited there, especially Brennan and Pettit 2004, Welsh 2008). There is no culture in which an individual could acquire the forms of self-esteem that membership of a 'dignity society' would require without the reinforcement and validation of the esteem of others. As Goffman long ago remarked, it is a feature of our development as social beings that 'the individual must rely on others to complete the picture of him of which he himself is allowed to paint only certain parts' (Goffman 1967, p. 84). The argument that culture A cares about 'honour' while culture B does not works only if we define 'honour' in restrictive, circular, and question-begging terms. Thus historical and cross-cultural comparisons focus not on absolute distinctions between the concern for esteem/recognition and the concern for dignity and self-esteem, but only on the different forms that these motivations take in different societies.

On some level, we all know that if we want to receive esteem, respect, and recognition, we need to accord them to others as well. But there are well-known biases that predispose us to focus more readily on others' failures than on our own, and given the mutual, relational nature of respect, the failure to accord others the respect they deserve is often the flipside of an excessive focus on the respect one seeks for oneself. The ancient Greeks call this *hybris* (Fisher 1992; Cairns 1996; Canevaro 2018; Cairns 2020; Rocchi 2023 in this issue). For Aristotle, *hybris* is a member of the family of attitudes (broadly defined as 'belittling', *oligôria*), to which also belongs contempt (*kataphronêsis*: see Mantzouranis 2023; Rocchi 2023, both in this issue). But *hybris* (or *hubris*), with all its links to the cognitive and affective biases mentioned above, is now a term of art in a number of modern disciplines too (Sadler-Smith 2018), and the scope for comparison of ancient Greek and contemporary

anglophone conceptions of *hubris* is substantial (Cairns, Bouras, and Sadler-Smith forthcoming).

In contemporary philosophical debate (well covered in the essays collected in Mason 2018b), contempt comes in a number of (partially overlapping) varieties: as a performance, an attitude, or a disposition (Darwall 2018, 2023; cf. Fischer and Giner-Sorolla, 2016); as active or passive (Bell, 2013, pp. 48–51; 2018, pp. 12–13); as focused or unfocused (Darwall 2018, 2023 in this issue); and, above all, as justifiable or unjustified (see below). Contempt (like its analogues in other cultures, as discussed in this issue) comes in 'hot' and 'cool' forms (Fischer and Giner-Sorolla, 2016, p. 346). It can be a way of treating people or a general attitude towards people. The attitude can be expressed in one's actions or merely attributed on their basis. The attitude can also be dispositional, without involving a specific and active expression of contempt at all. This emerges especially in cases in which contempt for another person is shown simply by a failure to take account of them, as when (in Aristotle's account of the *oligôria* and *kataphronêsis* that excite anger) one forgets their name (*Rhetoric* 2.2, 1379b33–5) or pays insufficient attention to their needs or problems (1379b14–19), or if one appears to treat them less well now than one has in the past (1379b4–6) or less well than you treat other people (1379b31–3). Like contempt, Aristotle's *oligôria* involves the suggestion that the other is of no account (1378b11–14, 30–1), whether by commission or omission.

Although it is possible to distinguish between (on the one hand) contemptible persons and (on the other) contemptible actions or contemptible pursuits, both in contemporary English (e.g. Roseman 2018, p. 111) and in the classical languages that are the focus of this issue, such as Latin (Junghanß 2023) and Chinese (Lai 2023; Virág 2023), it is often claimed that contempt focuses on whole persons rather than actions (Mason 2003; Bell 2013; Bell 2018,

p.5; the empirical data from contemporary US English collected in Malle et al. 2018, pp. 87–9, bear this out to some extent), denying them the recognition and respect that persons ordinarily deserve. It puts others, whether individuals or groups, on a lower level, socially or morally, and thus has a relational, comparative, and reflexive aspect (as we see, for example, in Aristotle's pairing of *kataphronêsis* with emulation, *zêlos*, as negative and positive ways of comparing one's own worth with that of another, *Rhetoric* 2.11, 1388b23–4; cf. Bell 2013, p. 41–3). The lower level on which the other is placed may be defined with regard to some defined standard rather than simply relative to oneself, but even in that case there is probably always a sense that, in feeling or showing contempt, I regard myself as superior, at least in so far as I see myself as meeting the standard that the other fails to meet (Roseman 2018, p. 112; cf. Cogley 2018, p. 138; Sussman 2018, pp. 155–6).

If that is what contempt does, then there is a question as to whether contempt is ever justified. As Darwall argues both elsewhere (Darwall 2018) and in this issue (Darwall 2023), there is a sense in which contempt is the contrary of the respect for persons that the second-person standpoint requires. On this view, as a whole-person attitude, contempt dismisses and excludes, by contrast with attitudes such as blame, resentment, indignation, and punishment, all of which regard the other as a morally responsive and responsible interactant (on contempt and blame: Fischer and Giner-Sorolla 2016; Malle, Voiklis, and Kim 2018; Cogley 2018, 139; Darwall 2018, 206–10 and in this issue; cf. Mason 2003 on contempt and resentment). Bell in particular resists the suggestion that contempt need not be an all-encompassing, whole-person judgement (Bell 2013, 40–1), but competent users of English disagree (Roseman 2018, p. 118; Cogley 2018, p. 137 and passim); and both Junghanß and Virág in this issue discuss Roman and Chinese thinkers who believe that it is possible to despise a person's actions or shortcomings without necessarily holding that person in absolute

contempt. Darwall, in fact (2018, p. 207; cf. Mason 2003), recognizes a 'focused contempt' that can call out shortcomings and invite change, even though it is still hierarchical in nature in ways that can be problematic or questionable. On this view it is only unfocused contempt that is incompatible with the idea of the equal dignity of persons. Similarly, in this issue, Darwall argues that contempt is typically toxic for both its subject and its object, especially in the shame or internalized contempt that it engenders in the latter. But shame is sometimes warranted, even essential; shamelessness is not a desirable condition. Focused shame is thus focused contempt's constructive counterpart.

Shamelessness, by the same token, also involves a form of contempt, as Aristotle recognizes (*Rhetoric* 2.3, 1380a18–21):

> We cease to be angry towards those who agree that they are being justly punished. The reason for this is that denying what is obvious is shamelessness (*anaischyntia*), and shamelessness is belittlement (*oligôria*) and contempt (*kataphronêsis*) – at any rate, we feel no shame before/respect for those whom we greatly despise.

Shamelessness here involves a lack of self-respect – openly denying the obvious – and a lack of respect for one's audience. It involves not caring about others and not caring about what others think of us, advertising the absence of the sense of honour that makes a person a reliable interactant. Such a focus on the honour of both self and others is typical of the relevant ancient Greek concepts: the central term here, *aidôs* (and to some extent also its close synonym, *aischynê*), is used to cover both what we would call shame and what we would call respect, implicitly recognizing the interplay of demeanour and deference as outlined in Goffman's classic (1967) account of interaction ritual.

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Related to shamelessness as a form of *oligôria* is the already-mentioned *hybris*, a way of belittling or dishonouring others that (according again to Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.2, 1378b23–30) serves to demonstrate the agent's pleasure in their own superiority. Like shamelessness (*anaischyntia*) and its opposites (*aischynê* or *aidôs*), *hybris* is bidirectional in focus, implicating our own honour and that of others – agents assert their own claims while failing properly to recognize those of others. But *hybris* is a vice: the norm that it violates is that of mutual respect. For Aristotle, however, the response to *hybris* is anger, an emotion that reasserts the claims that have been violated. But Darwall (2023, in this issue) draws attention to Macalester Bell's persuasive argument 'that contempt can be a justifiable response to "vices of superiority" (Bell 2013)'. *Hybris* is just such a vice, though Bell's term for it is its close analogue in Latin, *superbia*. For Bell, this is the failing that makes contempt apt, despite its being a whole-person, totalizing attitude, on her view (Bell 2013, 2018; cf. Mason 2003, 2018a on reactive contempt). Unfocused contempt, then, need not lead only to shame; it can lead also to anger and to reactive contempt.

Arguably, such contempt might not only condemn and reject, but also act as an invitation to dialogue or to reform. Such contempt might be not be an all or nothing, once and for all rejection, but a move in an iterated series of interactions or a strategy to repair a damaged relationship (Bell 2013, pp. 152–4, 227–71; cf. Roseman 2018, pp. 119–24; Cogley 2018; Sussman 2018), even when expressed as avoidance and withdrawal (Cogley 2018, 141–3). Essentially, this is the position that most of the contributors to this special issue find most attractive – ancient Chinese, Greek, Indian, and Roman sources furnish plentiful examples of focused, apt, reactive contempt as a response to vices of superiority, typically the contemptuous attitudes and behaviour of others.

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For Aristotle, as discussed by **Kleanthis Mantzouranis** ('What does Aristotle's moral exemplar feel contempt for?'), contempt can have a role in a virtuous life, when people who are genuinely morally good (in fact morally perfect) despise their moral inferiors. Aristotle's general position commends treating others in accordance with their worth, and the most important criteria of worth are moral. In the *Politics*, however, he does recognize that other claims to worth, such as free birth, also have a role to play, so it need not be the case that the virtuous person's contempt for the non-virtuous entails no recognition whatever of any justified claim on their part. Aristotle also recognizes that contempt can be dangerous: there is no warrant for it in people who are *not* genuinely good, people who are *not* able to diagnose genuine moral inferiority in others. Their contempt for others, Mantzouranis argues, attracts the justified contempt of the virtuous. Aristotle also knows that contempt is pragmatically dangerous in political contexts, both when rulers or ruling elites despise those that they exclude from political participation and when the ruled come to despise their rulers.

In her contribution, 'From (apt) contempt to (legal) dishonor: Two kinds of contempt and the penalty of *atimia*', **Linda Rocchi** discusses ancient Greek and especially Classical Athenian attitudes to 'apt' and 'inapt' contempt, showing how Athenian law both institutionalized and policed social norms regarding both. The Athenians, in their law against *hybris,* actually legislated against Bell's 'vices of superiority'. At the same time, *atimia* (literally 'dishonour') was used as a penalty for range of offences. The Athenian state thereby demanded standards of performance (typically in one's obligations to the state, but also in certain more general forms of socially approved behaviour) in which failure might result in withdrawal of some or all of a person's rights as citizen. *Atimia* withdrew the right that one enjoyed *qua* citizen to be recognized as an equal.

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In her contribution, 'Virtuous contempt and the ritual community in Confucius and Xúnzǐ', **Curie Virág** explores how 'in both the *Analects* and the *Xunzi*, contempt, broadly speaking, was presented as an appropriate and justified response for a person of virtuous character, but also that there were significant differences between the two thinkers with respect to what they deemed contempt-worthy, the extent to which one was justified in displaying such contempt, and in which manner'. In Confucius, the master's contempt for errant pupils looms large; in *Xunzi*, contempt for the morally unworthy, especially those who themselves engage in 'toxic' forms of contempt, is the obverse of the honour accorded the worthy – contempt, like honour, is a matter of treating others as they deserve.

In 'Mutual contempt in the *Zhuangzi*' **Karyn Lai** explores the significance of an encounter between Confucius and an ex-criminal known as Shushan or No-toes Uncle Mountain, whose mutilation as a punishment for his crimes visually embodies his supposed moral impairment and invites others to see him as an object of contempt. For Confucius, the man's status as a convicted criminal is sufficient to justify what he sees as justified contempt in its absolute, totalizing form, and he wants nothing to do with Shushan. But, mirroring Confucius' response, Shushan reacts with contempt for him in turn, reasserting his own moral worth and winning Confucius' admiration. A further theme of Lai's contribution is the sage's contempt for the mundane concerns of the unenlightened – 'the *Zhuangzi* ... is contemptuous of how [their] culture restricts the repertoire of humanity'.

This is a theme that arises also in Antje Junghanß's paper on contempt in Seneca's *De constantia*, where the sage is presented as exhibiting contempt for concerns other than morality, for all those matters that the Stoics regarded as 'indifferents'. In particular, the sage shows contempt for others' attempts to harm or insult him: the sage will not care about

external aspects of honour, but instead relies on his own estimation of himself. Equally, the contempt of others, as an attempt to demonstrate their own superiority, rebounds on them. Both of these attitudes represent misplaced judgements of value. The sage, however, despises only the sin, not the sinner. Vicious contempt, Bell's *superbia,* is met with contempt not for the contemnor, but only for the attitude and the actions that spring from it. Yet Junghanß also questions whether a total separation between contempt for acts and contempt for agents is possible or desirable, noting the element of passive contempt in Seneca's seventh letter to Lucilius (7.8)*,* where the philosopher advises 'those who do not want to be contaminated by other people's vices to withdraw from their company'.

The wider ramifications of contempt in Roman society are addressed by **Verena Schulz**, 'Expressing contempt in Rome: Language, rhetoric, and critique'. Exploring the Latin vocabulary for 'contempt', Schulz emphasizes the fundamentally hierarchizing nature of the attitudes involved, but notes that Roman norms sanction Darwall's 'focused contempt' in certain circumstances. A striking case of contempt which is both legitimate *and* anti-hierarchical is that of Epicharis, a former slave, for Nero, as presented in the *Annals* of the historian Tacitus. In contrast to her freeborn and upper-class male counterparts –participants , like her, in a conspiracy to overthrow the emperor – and despite her sex and her status, Epicharis demonstrates her contempt for Nero as emperor and for his attempts to humiliate and break her. As frequently in Tacitus, the dignity of subaltern figures serves to underline the corruption and degeneracy not just of the Emperor but of the ruling class that acquiesces in Empire.

A similar and striking case of reactive contempt is explored in **Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad**'s contribution 'Contempt and righteous anger: A gendered perspective from a Classical Indian

epic'. Ram-Prasad focuses on an episode in the *Mahābhārata* in which Princess Draupadī is publicly disrespected and degraded, forced to appear before men not only improperly dressed but also while menstruating. Draupadī reacts with anger at the toxic contempt with which she is treated, but her anger is at the same time contempt for her tormentors' failure to measure up to standards of proper behaviour. She regards their degrading treatment of her also as degrading for them. Reciprocal, mutual contempt, based on the one side on hierarchical and gendered distinctions of status and on the other on generalized moral norms, pervades the scene. Draupadi's reactive contempt is morally purposeful, drawing attention to behaviour of which an individual *should* be ashamed and which others should condemn: in this episode, the toxic shame, the internalized contempt that toxic contempt induces – the focus of Darwall's paper in this issue – has as its counterpart the moral shame to which reactive, justified contempt appeals. Draupadī is both angry at and contemptuous of her assailants here, and her non-verbal behaviour – she 'barely looks at them (merely glances at them with blazing scorn)' – expresses both. Refusal to engage, whether verbally or in terms of eye-contact, is (as several of our contributors confirm) widely attested as a sign of contempt, but it can also be an expression of anger and a way of punishing an offender (see Cairns 2001; cf. Malle et al. 2018, pp. 83, 95–6).

In this episode, contempt is on both sides very much both an attitude and a performance. The performative side of contempt figures in several of the contributions, but is highlighted in particular in **Maria Heim**'s paper on 'The workings of contempt in Classical Indian texts'. In these sources, Heim explains, 'contempt was not seen as an interior state to be theorized or managed therapeutically or morally. Rather, words for contempt are used to describe behaviors, etiquette, and social relationships, and are principally concerned with stipulating social status.' Contempt is not explicitly thematized or subjected to fine-grained analysis,

unlike other emotions in the Indian tradition. The performance of contempt in action and inaction looms large, not least in the three episodes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* that Heim chooses as case-studies and which, *inter multa alia*, corroborate Ram-Prasad's account of the interactive dynamics of contempt and counter-contempt in Indian epic (e.g. in the way that Rāma's contempt for Sītā occasions shame, but is also countered by her anger and contempt on her own part).

The emphasis of our contributors on reciprocal, mutual, and reactive forms of contempt – on contempt for the contemnor – underlines the place of contempt as a feature of interpersonal relationships that are irreducibly interactive. In Goffman's terms, contempt is a form of demeanour that withholds the deference that is the aim and expectation in the other's own self-presentation. If reactive contempt can be effective as a move in the attempt to call out and resist the toxic contempt that wrongly excludes and belittles, we should nonetheless never lose sight of how toxic the latter can be, as **Stephen Darwall** in his contribution, 'The wages of contempt', powerfully reminds us. Though ancient paragons of moral perfection, such as Aristotle's *megalopsychos* or the Stoic *sapiens* envisaged by Seneca (Mantzouranis 2023; Junghanß 2023, both in this issue), may be able to rise above the contempt of others, those for whom contempt is structural feature of their supposed place in society, at least in the eyes of some, are less likely to have the resources to place themselves in that fortunate position. Where such forms of contempt are entrenched, the wages of contempt are a heavy burden.

The demand that recognition should be mutual is underlined especially in its denial (Honneth (1995), ch. 2), a salient form of which is contempt. Whether we justify it in certain circumstances or condemn it in most, contempt is everywhere in our contemporary societies,

from everyday social encounters to the relations between ruling classes and the citizens they presume to rule. It was, perhaps, ever thus. But if that is the case, what is the point of historical and cross-cultural comparison? What light can the classical thought of China, Greece, India, and Rome to shed on the conceptualization, theorization, and accommodation of this powerful emotional, social, and political phenomenon?

One thing in particular that the studies contained in this special issue – and many of those on which they draw – highlight about contempt is its dynamic and relational nature as a phenomenon that is inevitably embedded in interactive, interpersonal relationships shaped by their social and cultural contexts. Contempt is not primarily understood through introspection or hypotheses about others' internal affective states. Performative contempt, indeed, can be understood without reference to any particular occurrent affective state at all: as Darwall observes (2023, in this issue), 'It is an important feature of performative contempt that it can be performed without the attitude and without even its audience believing that the performer has the attitude.' The same might equally be said of many forms of passive contempt – failing to take others' legitimate claims into account may indicate a dispositional form of contempt for them or simply an overvaluation of the self (*hybris* or *superbia*) that entails a general disinclination to give others their due; but the point is that the action or its omission is sufficient in itself for an episode to count as an episode of contempt. As many have noted (e.g. Mason 2003, p. 239, Bell 2013, pp. 26–8; Malle et al, 2018, pp. 81, 84), even active contempt seems to involve no *characteristic* feeling and sometimes no particular feeling at all, appearing instead in at least some of its manifestations as more like an attitude than an occurrent affective state. Contempt's expression, performance, and consequences – political, social, and interpersonal – all matter hugely. Contempt is played out in rich social contexts of conditions, causes, expressions, motives, actions (or omissions), and effects. Conditions,

causes, and motives can have deep social and historical roots; actions and their effects can have profound social and historical implications. As Maria Heim and Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad in particular highlight, historically conditioned social and cultural norms governing factors such as class, status, and gender profoundly influence the ways in which episodes of contempt unfold. But this is true of emotions more generally: even in those episodes in which a subjectively experienced occurrent affective state is salient and central, emotions involve much more than subjectively experienced occurrent affective states. As phenomena with an event-structure of their own, they encompass a range of factors that are not private, hidden, or purely subjective, but are played out in interactive social contexts shaped by the intersubjective categories of language and culture (see Cairns 2022, pp. 7–32, with further references and discussion). As events in their own right, emotion episodes both lend themselves to representation in narrative terms and perform a crucial motivational and structural role in the development of wider narrative structures. They are thus accessible to historical and cross-cultural analysis. If contempt is an emotion, it has much to show us about how we might think of emotions more generally. The issues that arise where contempt is in play are issues that all societies must confront somehow. Historical and cross-cultural comparison alerts us to the range of variation within which the relevant phenomena manifest themselves and in the ways in which they are construed and evaluated. Contempt's social embeddedness means – at the very least – that we can study much of what contempt is in cross-cultural, historical terms; in a great many cases, indeed, we can study all that is important about the concept using the resources and methods that historians typically use.

And so there is as much to be learned in these matters from Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca, from Daoism and Confucianism, and from classical Indian thought as from contemporary philosophers and psychologists. But there is also a particularly important role for narrative,

and especially for the culturally significant narratives with which literary-historical disciplines such as Classics, Sanskrit studies, and Sinology engage. The use of literature in particular may act as a valuable corrective to philosophers' tendency to long 'for a neater conceptual world than we in fact possess' (Morris 1987, p. 222). As Maria Heim writes (in this issue), 'literature and narrative deliver an irreducible and irreplaceable contribution to emotion studies in providing context and resisting the generic'. The use of the narratives of past cultures is very far from being simply a matter of conceptual analysis. The cultures studied in this issue differ in the extent to which their emotion lexica contain concepts closely analogous to English 'contempt'. But whether we are investigating the sense and reference of English 'contempt' or exploring whatever analogues to that notion there may be in the languages of ancient China, Greece, India, and Rome, our task is fundamentally one of focusing on scripts, contexts, and forms of social interaction that can be studied even where the lexicon divides them up differently. Again, Maria Heim (in this issue) puts it perfectly:

> If the study of emotions is to reach beyond its origins and assumptions in the modern West, it needs to explore intellectual traditions beyond it. The world's classics await. We breathe fresh air when we look to entirely different intellectual worlds to see how they systematize, categorize, narrate, and reflect on emotional experience.

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