Imagining Yourself in Another's Shoes versus Extending Your Concern: Empirical & Ethical Differences

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According to the Golden Rule, you should do unto others as you would have others do unto you. Similarly, people are often exhorted to "imagine themselves in another's shoes." A related but contrasting approach to moral expansion traces back to the ancient Chinese philosopher Mengzi, who urges us to "extend" our concern for those nearby to more distant people. Other approaches to moral expansion involve attending to the good consequences for oneself of caring for others, expanding one's sense of self, expanding one's sense of community, attending to others' morally relevant properties, and learning by doing. About all such approaches, we can ask three questions: To what extent do people in fact (for instance, developmentally) broaden and deepen their care for others by these different methods? To what extent do these different methods differ in ethical merit? And how effectively do these different methods produce appropriate care?

According to the Golden Rule, you should do unto others as you would have others do unto you. Similarly, you might imagine yourself in "another person's shoes"; or you might aspire to "love thy neighbor as thyself"; or you might sympathetically attempt to feel what another is feeling, coming thereby to want or loathe what they want or loathe. Considered as approaches to expanding or deepening our care or concern for others, all of these approaches share a core idea: They treat self-concern as a given and as the seed from which care for others might grow. You model others upon yourself and treat them as you would like to be treated.

A different approach treats concern for *nearby others* as a given and as the seed from which care for more distant others might grow. If you'd care for a nearby child, so also should you care for more distant children. If you'd want something for your sister, so also should you want something similar for other women. This approach to moral expansion differs substantially from Others' Shoes / Golden Rule thinking, both in its ethical shape and in its empirical implications.

The two approaches can complement each other. They needn't compete. And other approaches are also possible, as I'll discuss, including noticing alignments

between self- and other-interest, expanding one's sense of self, expanding one's sense of community, attending to ethically relevant properties, and learning by doing. About all such approaches, we can ask three questions: To what extent do people *in fact* (for instance, developmentally) broaden and deepen their care for others by these different methods? To what extent do these different methods *differ in ethical merit?* And *how effectively* do these different methods produce appropriate care? The answers, of course, aren't simple.

In this essay, I focus on the contrast between the first and second approaches: that is, Others' Shoes / Golden Rule thinking versus extending one's concern from nearby others to more distant others. The latter approach has been relatively less explored and theorized, and so I begin by tracing its roots in ancient Chinese Confucianism, specifically in the philosopher Mengzi. I suggest that *Mengzian Extension*, as I call it, is both ethically and empirically attractive. I also suggest how ethicists and moral psychologists would benefit from more systematically exploring ethical and empirical differences among different approaches to the expansion of care.

Mengzi is the most prominent ancient Confucian after Confucius himself, flourishing near the end of the fourth century BCE. He is known especially for his doctrine that "human nature is good" (xìng shàn 性善). As he lays out in one famous passage:

> The reason why I say that all humans have hearts that are not unfeeling toward others is this. Suppose someone suddenly saw a child about to fall into a well: Anyone in such a situation would have a feeling of alarm and compassion – not because one sought to get in good with the child's parents, not because one wanted fame among one's neighbors and friends, and not because one would dislike the sound of the child's cries (Book 2, Part A, Chapter 6, 46).[1]

Empirically, the claim is plausible. Everyone (nearly everyone?) would feel alarm and compassion upon suddenly encountering a child about to fall into a well, and not on selfish grounds.

Notice what Mengzi is *not* saying here. He is not saying that everyone would try to save the child. Nor is he saying that we can't smother our alarm and compassion or gird ourselves in advance with callousness. Rather, if we *suddenly* – unprepared, off-guard – come across a child at a well's edge, we will have a certain momentary reaction. Mengzi is also not saying that everyone is already benevolent. As he explains later in the same passage, "The feeling of compassion is the sprout [duān 端] of benevolence." Mengzi's view is that we all have the *capacity to become* benevolent, by nurturing the "sprout" within us that naturally feels alarm and compassion in situations like these.

In this passage, Mengzi draws no connection between concern for the child and self-concern, not even an implicit or indirect connection. Mengzi is not say-

ing that we see the child as like us, or that we imagine how we would feel if we were the child or the child's parents, or that we would want to be saved in a similar situation. Etymologically, "compassion" (cè 惻) in classical Chinese does not suggest co-passion, or feeling together. If it etymologically suggests anything (and there's reason to be cautious about over-etymologizing), it is instead that compassion is something like the heart's pattern, rule, or logic.

In several other passages, Mengzi notes that a natural concern for those nearby can be extended into more general concern for distant others:

> That which people are capable of without learning [xué 學] is their genuine capability. That which they know without pondering [lǜ 慮] is their genuine knowledge. Among babes in arms there are none that do not know to love their parents. When they grow older, there are none that do not know to revere their elder brothers. Treating one's parents as parents is benevolence. Revering one's elders is righteousness. There is nothing else to do but extend these to the world (7A15, 174–175; 無他, 達之天下也).

For Mengzi, the root of benevolence and righteousness is familial love and reverence, which people naturally possess without having to "learn" or "ponder." The moral developmental challenge is to extend these reactions beyond the family.

Mengzi served awhile as an advisor to King Xuan, despotic ruler of the powerful state of Qi. King Xuan's character is illustrated by the following episode: Aiming to acquire new territory, King Xuan invaded the neighboring state of Yan. The people of Yan, apparently eager to be free from their own terrible king, welcomed the invaders with baskets of food and pots of soup. Nevertheless, King Xuan bound and killed them, destroyed their ancestral temples, and plundered their goods (1B11, 28).

In one recorded dialogue, Mengzi recommends that King Xuan "care for the people" (1A7, 8). King Xuan replies skeptically, asking if someone like him *could* care for the people. Mengzi relates an episode he had heard from an attendant:

> While the king was sitting up in his hall, an ox was led past below. The king saw it and said, "Where is the ox going?" Hu He replied, "We are about to ritually anoint a bell with its blood." The king said, "Spare it. I cannot bear its frightened appearance, like an innocent going to the execution ground." Hu He replied, "So should we dispense with the anointing of the bell?" The king said, "How can that be dispensed with? Exchange it for a sheep" (1A7, 8).

The king couldn't bear the suffering of the ox, though if it was really animal suffering he cared about, then his decision was confusing, since the sheep presumably also suffered. A puzzle! His subjects thought he was merely being cheap.

Mengzi politely refrains from mentioning the absurdity of the king's compassion for an ox because it *looks like* an innocent person being led to execution, given that – I think we can guess – the king probably sometimes ordered the execution

of innocent men. What Mengzi does suggest is that if the king can be moved by the suffering of an ox, he can care for his people. For the king to say otherwise would be like his saying he could see the tip of a hair but not a cartload of firewood.

To care for the people, the king must extend (tuī 推) his kindness, favor, or mercy (ēn 恩):

> Treat your elders as elders, and extend it to the elders of others; treat your young ones as young ones, and extend it to the young ones of others. … If one extends one's kindness, it will be sufficient to care for all within the Four Seas (1A7, 11).

In the recent secondary literature on Mengzi, there's some debate about what Mengzi recommends "extending." Are you to extend your emotions or instead something like rational principles of analogous treatment?[2] The full Mengzian view probably involves both aspects, each supporting the other. Mengzian Extension, as I see it, is the following idea: We are naturally concerned about spatially and relationally nearby others. We should notice that distant cases are often relevantly similar to those nearby cases, even if we aren't immediately and naturally moved by them. We should extend our natural concern – our actions, feelings, and motivations – from the nearby cases to the more distant cases in a way that appropriately reflects the relevant similarities. (This isn't to say that all of our spontaneous caring reactions are appropriate to act upon. As a good Confucian, Mengzi presumably would have approved of the ritual sacrifice of the ox, and he explicitly advises the "gentleman" to stay away from the kitchen so as not to be excessively influenced by the suffering of animals killed for meat [1A7, 9].)

More familiar to readers of recent Anglophone ethics might be philosopher Peter Singer's example of the drowning child.[3] Suppose you were to encounter a child drowning in a shallow pond. You could easily save the child's life by wading into the pond, but doing so would ruin the expensive new shoes you recently purchased. Surely you should forget about the expense of your shoes and save the child. But if you would sacrifice an expensive pair of shoes to save a nearby child, you should also be willing to sacrifice a similar amount of money to save the life of a distant child. The fact that the child in need happens to be spatially nearby is not, Singer claims, morally relevant. Therefore, if you have the chance to save a distant child's life by sacrificing a moderate amount of money, you should do so; and through donating to effective charities, you do, right now, have this opportunity. Singer's pond argument shares a common core with Mengzian Extension. It starts from assumed concern for an actual or hypothetical nearby person (or animal), then invites us to extend that concern to relevantly similar others farther away.

A long, diverse, and better-known tradition emphasizes Others' Shoes / Golden Rule thinking. I will not attempt a scholarly summary of that tradition here, other than to note its famous appearance in the Christian Bi-

ble (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31) and subsequent Christian tradition, its etymological and sometimes explicit connection with "sympathy," and its connection with "simulation theories" of our understanding of others' minds.[4]

We might model Others' Shoes / Golden Rule thinking as follows:

- If I were in the situation of Person X, I would want to be treated in manner M.
- Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have others do unto you.
- Thus, I will treat Person X in manner M.

We might model Mengzian Extension as follows:

- I care about Person Y and want W for them.
- Person X, though more distant, is relevantly similar to Person Y.
- Thus, I want W for Person X.

Alternative and more complex formulations are possible, but this sketch captures the central difference between these two approaches to moral cognition. Mengzian Extension models general moral concern on the natural concern we already have for others close to us (whether spatially close, like the child at the well or King Xuan's ox, or relationally close, like our parents and siblings), while the Golden Rule models general moral concern on concern for oneself.

Empirically, we can ask: Which model comes closer to capturing the ordinary patterns of moral cognition and development in children and adults? When we feel concern for someone else, does it tend to be because we use ourselves as a model for the other person, and knowing what we would hypothetically want, we then come to want the same thing for them? Or does concern for nearby others arise in a simpler and less self-involving way (without "learning" or "pondering") that can then be extended to more distant others? (Already from this way of posing the question – and to anticipate the next section – we can see that this is not an exhaustive list of possible forms of moral cognition.) If we had the right kind of cognit-o-meter, would we find representations of the self and one's own hypothetical desires at the root of much of moral thinking and moral growth? Or would we typically find some more direct, non-self-involving path to concern for those nearby, and then something like analogy or comparison when contemplating more distant cases?

The cognitive complexity of Others' Shoes thinking becomes evident if we compare it with the cognitive demands in the development of empathy as articulated in psychologist Martin Hoffman's influential work. Only in middle childhood, Hoffman argues – around six to nine years – do children appear to have the cognitive sophistication to empathize in a manner that clearly distinguishes their emotions from the emotions of others, correctly anticipating what others might

feel in hypothetical situations that differ from their own.[5] In general, Others' Shoes thinking, at least in its mature form, appears to require combining a relatively sophisticated "theory of mind" with relatively sophisticated hypothetical thinking. You must hypothetically imagine being in another person's situation, typically with different beliefs, desires, and emotions, and you must assess what you, in that hypothetical situation with that transformed psychology, would probably want. Such sophisticated hypothetical cognitive and affective perspective-taking is likely to be challenging for the typical preschooler.[6]

One well-known problem for Others' Shoes thinking is what we might call the Cherry Pie Problem.[7] Suppose you love cherry pie. I loathe cherry pie. I'd rather have chocolate cake. When planning a party for me, you shouldn't ask yourself what dessert you would want at the party, if you were in my shoes. You should ask what *I* would want. You shouldn't actually do unto me – cherry pie – what you would want to have done unto you. You should instead give me the dessert you know that I prefer. The Cherry Pie Problem has a cognitive, an epistemic, and a conceptual dimension.

Cognitively, it's clear that Others' Shoes thinking, to be effective, requires building a hypothetical change of desires into the cognitive exercise. Assume, hypothetically, that you had my dessert preferences: what would you want if the party was for you and if your favorite dessert was whatever is in fact my favorite dessert? But this is a needlessly complex cognitive operation compared with a simpler rule to give people the dessert they prefer.

Epistemically, Others' Shoes thinking also presents a needless challenge: you now have to figure out what dessert you would want if you were in my position and if you had such-and-such different desires. But how do you figure out which desires (and beliefs, and emotions, and personality traits, and so on) to change and which to hold the same for this thought experiment? And how do you know how you would react in such a hypothetical case? By routing the epistemic task of choosing a dessert for someone else through a hypothetical self-transformation, it potentially becomes harder to know or justify a choice than if the choice is based directly on knowledge of the other's beliefs, desires, or emotions.

Conceptually, the problem is that there might not even be facts to track. Consider an extreme case: what treat would you want if you were a prize-winning show poodle? The hypothetical might be so remote and underspecified that there is no determinate fact about what "you" would want in that case. Better just to go straight to bland generalizations: if you want to delight a prize-winning show poodle, just figure out as best you can what treats that sort of dog tends to like.

Mengzian Extension presents a different range of developmental, cognitive, epistemic, and conceptual challenges. Developmentally and cognitively, Mengzian Extension requires recognizing what one wants for nearby others, and then reaching a judgment about whether more distant others are relevantly similar.

This requires an ability to generalize one's ethical knowledge beyond immediate cases based on an assessment of what do and do not constitute differences that are relevant to the generalization. Although this is potentially complex and demanding, it is not quite as convoluted as the hypothetical situational and motivational perspective-taking envisioned in Others' Shoes thinking. In principle, it resembles other instances of generalization beyond nearby cases: The bottle here breaks when I smash it, so other bottles are probably similar. The teacher said it was wrong for Emily to copy answers from Omar, so it's probably also wrong for Tanseem to copy answers from Miranda. My four-year-old sister loves when I play Clue with her, so other four-year-old girls would probably also love to play Clue. As this last example suggests, such inferences have risks.

We might hybridize Mengzian Extension and Others' Shoes reasoning: If you know what your sister would want, you can assume that is what other girls her age would want. Do unto the distant innocent person as you would do unto the nearby innocent person. If the targets more closely resemble each other than you resemble them, the epistemic and conceptual challenges inherent in Others' Shoes thinking would be mitigated.

The ethical character of Others' Shoes / Golden Rule thinking also differs from that of Mengzian Extension. Except in the simplest consequentialism, the thought behind an action is relevant to the moral evaluation of that action. The thought *if that was me, A is what I would want, so I'll do A* reflects a different style of thinking than *I want A for my daughter, so I want A for this other child*. Others' Shoes thinking grounds moral action in displaced *self-concern*, while Mengzian Extension grounds moral action in displaced *other concern*. While there's something ethically admirable about seeing others as like oneself and thus as deserving the types of treatment one would want for oneself, I'd also suggest that there's also something a bit . . . self-centered? egoistic? . . . about habitually grounding moral action through the lens of hypothetical self-interest. Mengzian Extension assumes, more appealingly, that concern for nearby others requires no reasoning – no "learning" or "pondering," no imaginative transportation or analogizing to the self – and that broader concern can be grounded in a way that doesn't require imaginative consideration of one's own interests.

Recent Western depictions of "circles of concern" typically put the self at the center, close others as the next ring out, and more distant others in ever-expanding circles.[8] Confucians accept a somewhat similar picture of "graded love" from family to neighbors to others in one's state to the world as a whole. But there's a crucial difference: the starting point and inmost circle in Confucian conceptions of graded love is always concern for near family. It would be antithetical to the spirit of Confucian graded love to place self-concern at the center of one's moral thinking, with one's parents and children in the second ring out.

There's an implicit me-first-ism in models of moral concern that put oneself at the center, which Confucian approaches generally lack. Inner-ring me-first-ism invites the idea that self-concern is the inescapable hard nut from which concern from others must always grow. Rousseau, for example, in *Emile*, an extended work of fiction that appears to be describing an idealized form of moral education, endorses the foundational importance of the Golden Rule, writing that "love of men derived from love of self is the principle of human justice."[9] Mengzi or Confucius would never say such a thing.

Now it is true that Confucius does twice appeal to a negative version of the Golden Rule, sometimes called the Silver Rule: "Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire."[10] I certainly don't think that Confucians must reject thoughtful applications of the Golden Rule. As I mentioned earlier, approaches to moral expansion can complement each other. But in Mengzi, this is at most a secondary strand.

Let me mention another ethically appealing feature of Mengzian Extension: it can be turned back upon oneself. It can be adapted to justify and motivate self-care or self-concern among those who are too self-effacing. This requires modifying or reinterpreting the assumption that extension is always to more "distant" others, and it is not something that Mengzi explicitly discusses, but it strikes me as a natural adaptation. If you would treat your father or sister in manner M, treat yourself, to the extent you are relevantly similar, in the same manner. If you would want your father to be able to take a vacation, recognize that you might deserve a vacation too. If you'd object to your sister being publicly insulted by her spouse, recognize that you also shouldn't accept such insults. We can benefit, sometimes, by generalizing back to ourselves. In such cases, Others' Shoes thinking seems to give exactly the wrong answer: because if you wouldn't take the vacation or object to the insult, your father and sister also shouldn't.

We can also ask which way of thinking is more effective in leading us to expand our care appropriately to others to whom we are too indifferent. If you want to convince a vicious king to be kinder to his people, is it more effective to encourage him to reflect on what he would want if he were a peasant, or is it more effective to highlight the similarities between people (or animals) he already cares about and those who are farther away? If you want to encourage donations to famine relief, is it better to ask people what they would want if they were starving, or to compare those distant others to nearby others they already care about?

I'm aware of no direct empirical tests of this question. However, I'll mention two pieces of suggestive evidence.

First, in the bad old days of the 1980s, disturbing images of malnourished children dominated TV appeals by famine-relief organizations. Since then, howev-

er, the tendency has strongly swung toward uplifting pictures and narratives in which donation recipients look like thriving neighbors, people it's easy to imagine as your exotically dressed cousins or friends – but again, with a disproportionate emphasis on pictures of children. Plausibly, this practice reflects hard-won practical expertise concerning what stimuli effectively induce donations.[11] The focus especially on children probably has several justifications – including their presumed greater innocence and helplessness – but it's worth noting that if you're an adult, it's probably more natural to see the resemblance between a seven-year-old Somali child and your own child than a seven-year-old Somali child and yourself. This emphasis on children thus fits more comfortably with a Mengzian mechanism than with an Others' Shoes / Golden Rule mechanism.

Second, in a recent study, my collaborators Kirstan Brodie, Jason Nemirow, Fiery Cushman, and I presented to online research participants ninety different arguments designed to motivate charitable giving, mostly written by professional philosophers and psychologists and submitted to us as part of a contest.[12] Participants read the arguments, or read a control text, then had an opportunity to donate a surprise bonus to charity. The author of the argument that produced the highest rates of donation received $500 plus a donation of $500 to their choice of effective charity. Contestants were instructed to minimize the emotionality of their appeal, not to include narrative elements, and not to refer to specific individuals or events.

In the first phase of the study, we selected twenty submissions that we thought represented a diversity of the most promising arguments. The winning argument was the following:

> Many people in poor countries suffer from a condition called trachoma. Trachoma is the major cause of preventable blindness in the world. Trachoma starts with bacteria that get in the eyes of children, especially children living in hot and dusty conditions where hygiene is poor. If not treated, a child with trachoma bacteria will begin to suffer from blurred vision and will gradually go blind, though this process may take many years. A very cheap treatment is available that cures the condition before blindness develops. As little as $25, donated to an effective agency, can prevent someone going blind later in life.
>
> How much would you pay to prevent your own child becoming blind? Most of us would pay $25,000, $250,000, or even more, if we could afford it. The suffering of children in poor countries must matter more than one-thousandth as much as the suffering of our own child. That's why it is good to support one of the effective agencies that are preventing blindness from trachoma, and need more donations to reach more people.[13]

The concluding paragraph of that entry appears to be a version of Mengzian Extension.

In the second phase of the study, we tested all ninety arguments. The best performing in this phase was the following:

HEAR ME OUT ON SOMETHING. The explanation below is a bit long, but I promise reading the next few paragraphs will change you.

As you know, there are many children who live in conditions of severe poverty. As a result, their health, mental development, and even their lives are at risk from lack of safe water, basic health care, and healthy food. These children suffer from malnutrition, unsanitary living conditions, and are susceptible to a variety of diseases. Fortunately, effective aid agencies (like the Against Malaria Foundation) know how to handle these problems; the issue is their resources are limited.

HERE'S A PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENT: Almost all of us think that we should save the life of a child in front of us who is at risk of dying (for example, a child drowning in a shallow pond) if we are able to do so. Most people also agree that all lives are of equal moral worth. The lives of faraway children are no less morally significant than the lives of children close to us, but nearby children exert a more powerful emotional influence. Why?

SCIENTISTS HAVE A PLAUSIBLE ANSWER: We evolved in small groups in which people helped their neighbors and were suspicious of outsiders, who were often hostile. Today we still have these "Us versus Them" biases, even when outsiders pose no threat to us and could benefit enormously from our help. Our biological history may predispose us to ignore the suffering of faraway people, but we don't have to act that way.

By taking money that we would otherwise spend on needless luxuries and donating it to an effective aid agency, we can have a big impact. We can provide safe water, basic health care, and healthy food to children living in severe poverty, saving lives and relieving suffering.

Shouldn't we, then, use at least some of our extra money to help children in severe poverty? By doing so, we can help these children to realize their potential for a full life. Great progress has been made in recent years in addressing the problem of global poverty, but the problem isn't being solved fast enough. Through charitable giving, you can contribute towards more rapid progress in overcoming severe poverty.

Even a donation [of] $5 can save a life by providing one mosquito net to a child in a malaria-prone area. FIVE DOLLARS could buy us a large cappuccino, and that same amount of money could be used to save a life.[14]

This argument has several elements, but notice again that Mengzian Extension appears to play a central role in the reasoning. Prior to testing, we coded all ninety arguments along twenty different dimensions, including one dimension reflecting something like Others' Shoes thinking ("Does the argument appeal to veil-of-

ignorance reasoning or other perspective-taking thought experiments?"). Eight of the ninety arguments were identified in this category. The average donation after those arguments was $3.29 (out of $10), versus $3.43 for the remaining arguments – obviously not suggestive of an effect.[15] Unfortunately, we didn't preregister a coding scheme for Mengzian Extension. However, an independent coder classified six of the ninety arguments post-hoc as involving Mengzian Extension, enabling a post-hoc analysis. The average donation of the Mengzian Extension arguments was $3.86 versus $3.38 for the remaining arguments, comparable to the largest effect sizes among the preregistered predictors ($0.40–$0.60).[16]

Self to other is a giant cognitive, metaphysical, and moral divide. Nearby other to more-distant other presents a much smaller gulf. If, as Mengzi thinks and as generally seems plausible, virtually all ordinary people already care about some nearby others, then Mengzian Extension presents what appears to be a relatively smooth path to the expansion of that concern, a path grounded not in displaced egoism but rather in the good impulses that we all already possess.

There are many other approaches to expanding or deepening one's care for others. These can also be evaluated in terms of the different cognitive mechanisms involved, including 1) the developmental and social psychological importance of those mechanisms in ordinary moral thinking, 2) the practical effectiveness or ineffectiveness of attempting to bolster use of those mechanisms, and 3) the relative moral merit of thoughts and actions driven by those mechanisms. I will briefly describe five more such approaches to give a sense of the potential fruitfulness of comparative analysis.

Virtue Is Rewarded. On this view, the world has a moral order: wickedness is punished, virtue rewarded. This might work through "immanent" psychological or social mechanisms. Acting ethically might tend to feel good, while acting wrongly might tend to feel bad, or acting wrongly might tend to harm social relationships in the long term in a way that tends to outweigh its apparent short-term benefits. Alternatively, reward and punishment might be "transcendent" – in the afterlife. Children's stories and popular movies tend to have happy endings: the good guys thrive and the bad guys get their punishment. If seen as moral teaching, such stories implicitly draw on the Virtue Is Rewarded approach. This approach raises concerns about psychological, sociological, and/or theological plausibility: is virtue really rewarded? Ethically, one might also wonder about the ethical worth of actions performed for these motives: is an action in fact ethically good if it is motivated by desire for reward? And motivationally, in the long term, how effective is it to reward, or to remind people of the potential natural rewards of, good behavior?

Expanded Self. This approach grounds ethical expansion in self-interest in a very different way than does Virtue Is Rewarded. Expanded Self approaches aim to undermine the conception of the self as stopping at the boundaries of the skin. Argu-

ably, there's a sense in which a mother might think of her baby as literally part of herself, so that in pursuing her baby's interest, she is pursuing self-interest – not indirectly, through expected benefits that will later come back to her (as in Virtue Is Rewarded), but directly. In the Chinese and other traditions, radical versions of this approach invite us to regard ourselves as "at one" with others, or with the entire world.[17] Less radically, suppose that being a spouse, or a parent, or a classicist, or a Luxembourger is central to your self-conception. The death of the loved one, or the collapse of your academic field or country, might be experienced as a direct blow to who you are. Social and personality psychologist William Swann's work on "identity fusion" attempts to quantify people's feelings of oneness with others and examine its correlates: for example, with expressed willingness to engage in extreme self-sacrifice.[18] There is, perhaps, something beautiful and admirable in feeling at one with others. However, oneness or identify fusion might be a demanding cognitive or motivational achievement that is unlikely to extend very far in practice except in unusual people or circumstances. And as with Virtue Is Rewarded, it is unclear how much ethical merit there is in acting from self-concern, even if the "self" is expanded.

Expanded In-Group. In-group–out-group or us-versus-them thinking appears to be pervasive across time and cultures. Though often associated with ethically troubling devaluation of those perceived as the out-group, in-group–out-group thinking can also plausibly be grounds for expanding concern and care, if the boundaries of the in-group can be expanded or if one can build up a conception of others as belonging to groups to which one also belongs. For example, one might start to think of friends as "like family," or one might embrace a cosmopolitan worldview that values citizens of other nations similarly to citizens of one's own nation. One might remind oneself that one's town, university, or subdiscipline is a community, an interacting group of "us" to which one owes concern. Like Mengzian Extension, Expanded In-Group thinking grounds ethical expansion directly in concern for others, but the basis is shared group belonging rather than relevant similarity.

Ethically Relevant Properties. Philosophical arguments often invite us to expand our concern by attending to ethically relevant properties of others. Classical utilitarianism, for example, treats people and animals as targets of moral concern to the extent they are capable of pleasure and suffering, and recommends acting so as to maximize the balance of pleasure over suffering regardless of whose pleasure or suffering it is.[19] Kantian deontology treats people as targets of moral concern in virtue of their rational capacities, arguing that we must not treat anyone as "mere means" to our ends rather than as an "end in themselves."[20] Expanding our concern for others by noticing that they have such ethically relevant properties as the capacity for suffering or rationality seems pure and admirable. However, a potential disadvantage to this approach is that it's empirically unclear to what extent relatively abstract philosophical thinking actually induces behavioral change.[21]

Learning by Doing. One might be pressured or enticed into performing acts of care for other people and, as a consequence, come to actually care for those people. This could operate through any of a variety of mechanisms. For example, in accord with cognitive dissonance theory, if the pressure or enticement is sufficiently subtle that one regards the action as voluntarily chosen, one might shift one's attitude about the value of the action, rather than regard oneself as having voluntarily done something for insufficient reason.[22] Or in accord with self-perception theory, one might observe that one is in fact performing acts characteristic of caring and conclude that one does in fact care.[23] More simply, one might discover the value of the act in the process of doing it: the worth of an ethical action might shine vividly through in a way one would not have anticipated in advance. Or good actions might simply become habitual or more readily come to mind as possibilities through repetition. Learning by Doing is thus not a single mechanism but a catchall for a diversity of mechanisms, each of which have different empirical roots, practical consequences, and ethical flavor.

Psychology, philosophy, and the social sciences remain a long way from understanding the complex sources of moral motivation and care for others. The ethical and empirical issues are complex, and researchers cannot realistically assign people to different long-term moral development regimens and then measure the results with a valid moral/care-o-meter. I hope to have illustrated the potential interest in more carefully exploring the empirical, practical, and ethical dimensions of Mengzian Extension versus Others' Shoes / Golden Rule thinking, and to have shown how the same type of inquiry could extend to other broad approaches to the expansion of moral concern.

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ENDNOTES

1 Bryan W. Van Norden, trans., *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Hackett, 2008), 46. All Mengzi citations are to this edition.

2 Kwong-loi Shun, "Moral Reasons in Confucian Ethics," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 16 (3–4) (1989): 317–343; Bryan W. Van Norden, "Kwong-loi Shun on Moral Reasons in Mencius," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 18 (4) (1991): 353–370; Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Confucian Self Cultivation and Mengzi's Notion of Extension," in *Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi*, ed. Xiusheng Liu and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Hackett, 2002), 221–241; David Wong, "Reasons and Analogical Reasoning in Mengzi," in *Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi*, ed. Xiusheng Liu and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Hackett, 2002), 187–220; Emily McRae, "The Cultivation of Moral Feelings and Mengzi's Method of Extension," *Philosophy East and West* 61 (4) (2011): 587–608; and Myeong-Seok Kim, "Moral Extension and Emotional Cultivation in Mèngzǐ," *Dao* 21 (3) (2022): 369–388. Contra Van Norden and Ivanhoe, and in accord with Shun and Kim, I am assuming that recognizing the need for consistency with one's reactions to nearby cases is central to Mengzian Extension. Either interpretative approach is probably consistent with Mengzi's sparse remarks; and Van Norden rightly notes that if consistency is the only motive, it could also be achieved by reducing one's concern for nearby cases.

3 Originally presented in Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1 (3) (1972): 229–243.

4 For a detailed overview of the Golden Rule as an ethical principle, see Harry J. Gensler, *Ethics and the Golden Rule* (Routledge, 2013). On sympathy, see especially Adam Smith's classic "projective" account in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford University Press, 1976); and Martin L. Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development* (Cambridge University Press, 2000). On simulation theories, see Luca Barlassina and Robert M. Gordon, "Folk Psychology as Mental Simulation," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/folkpsych-simulation.

5 Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development*.

6 See also Paul L. Harris, "From Simulation to Folk Psychology: The Case for Development," *Mind & Language* 7 (1–2) (1992): 120–144; Christina Schwenck, Bettina Göhle, Juliane Hauf, et al., "Cognitive and Emotional Empathy in Typically Developing Children: The Influence of Age, Gender, and Intelligence," *European Journal of Developmental Psychology* 11 (1) (2014): 63–76; and Leïla Bensalah, Stéphanie Caillies, and Marion Anduze, "Links Among Cognitive Empathy, Theory of Mind, and Affective Perspective Taking by Young Children," *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 177 (1) (2016): 17–31. Absent the capacity for sophisticated hypothetical adjustments, substantial error would be expected even on a cognitively economical "simulation theory" approach to perspective-taking that redeploys egocentric mechanisms to understand others. See Alvin I. Goldman, *Simulating Minds: The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Mindreading* (Oxford University Press, 2006); and Shannon Spaulding, "Cognitive Empathy," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Empathy*, ed. Heidi Maibom (Routledge, 2017), 13–21.

7 Dubbed the "Literal GR Fallacy" in Gensler, *Ethics and the Golden Rule*.

8 For example, see the images in Frans de Waal, *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals* (Harvard University Press, 1996), 213; and Richard B. Primack and Philip J. Cafaro, "Environmental Ethics," in *Encyclopedia of Biodiversity*, ed. Simon

Asher Levin (Elsevier, 2007). Others in the Western tradition do seem to start the circle with concern for family members, notably Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle: Ethics, Evolution, and Moral Progress*, 2nd ed. (Princeton University Press, 2011).

9 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (Basic Books, 1979), 235.

10 Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. Edward Slingerland (Hackett Publishing), 12.2, 126. See also ibid., 5.12, 44; and compare with Mengzi 4A9, 94. The negatively phrased Silver Rule might differ importantly in content from the positively phrased Golden Rule, suggesting only a negative duty not to harm and not also a positive duty to help.

11 For a review of the literature on motivating charitable giving, see René Bekkers and Pamala Wiepking, "A Literature Review of Empirical Studies of Philanthropy: Eight Mechanisms That Drive Charitable Giving," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 40 (5) (2011): 924–973.

12 Methods and preliminary results of Phase 1 are available at Eric Schwitzgebel, "Contest Winner! A Philosophical Argument That Effectively Convinces Research Participants to Donate to Charity," The Splintered Mind, June 23, 2020, https://schwitzsplinters .blogspot.com/2020/06/contest-winner-philosophical-argument.html.

13 This argument was authored by Matthew Lindauer and Peter Singer.

14 This argument was submitted by Alex Garinther, drawing most of its text from the "Rational Appeal" stimulus employed in Matthew Lindauer, Marcus Mayorga, Joshua D. Greene, et al., "Comparing the Effect of Rational and Emotional Appeals on Donation Behavior," *Judgment and Decision Making* 15 (3) (2020): 413–420.

15 t[9021] = -1.26, p = 0.21.

16 t[9021] = 3.78, p < 0.001. A preliminary write-up is available as Eric Schwitzgebel, "What Types of Argument Convince People to Donate to Charity? Empirical Evidence," The Splintered Mind, February 16, 2024, https://schwitzsplinters.blogspot.com/2024/02 /what-types-of-argument-convince-people.html.

17 Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Oneness: East Asian Conceptions of Virtue, Happiness, and How We Are All Connected* (Oxford University Press, 2017); and Philip J. Ivanhoe, Owen Flanagan, Victoria Harrison, et al., eds., *The Oneness Hypothesis: Beyond the Boundary of Self* (Columbia University Press, 2018).

18 William B. Swann and Michael D. Buhrmester, "Identity Fusion," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 24 (1) (2015): 52–57.

19 Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "Consequentialism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2023 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2023/entries/consequentialism.

20 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, revised edition, ed. Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Larry Alexander and Michael Moore, "Deontological Ethics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/ethics-deontological.

21 This is especially suggested by work on the moral behavior of ethics professors, which appears to be similar, across a wide variety of measures, to the moral behavior of professors not specializing in ethics, reviewed in Eric Schwitzgebel and Joshua Rust, "The Behavior of Ethicists," *A Companion to Experimental Philosophy*, ed. Justin Sytsma and Wesley Buckwalter (Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 225–233.

22 For a recent review, see Eddie Harmon-Jones and Judson Mills, "An Introduction to Cognitive Dissonance Theory and an Overview of Current Perspectives on the Theory," in *Cognitive Dissonance: Reexamining a Pivotal Theory in Psychology*, 2nd edition, ed. Eddie Harmon-Jones and Judson Mills (American Psychological Association, 2019), 3–24.

23 The classic statement of self-perception theory is Daryl J. Bem, "Self-Perception Theory," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 6 (1972): 1–62. Explicit praise by others for one's altruistic traits might further enhance this effect, as in Rosemary S. L. Mills and Joan E. Grusec, "Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Consequences of Praising Altruism," *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 35 (3) (1989): 299–326. Though the relationship between praise and motivation is likely complex rather than unidirectional; see Jennifer Henderlong and Mark R. Lepper, "The Effects of Praise on Children's Intrinsic Motivation: A Review and Synthesis," *Psychological Bulletin* 128 (5) (2002): 774–795.