VARIETIES OF PHILOSOPHICAL MISANTHROPY

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ABSTRACT: I argue that misanthropy is systematic condemnation of the moral character of humankind as it has come to be. Such condemnation can be expressed affectively and practically in a range of different ways, and the bulk of the paper sketches the four main misanthropic stances evident across the history of philosophy. Two of these, the Enemy and Fugitive stances, were named by Kant, and I call the others the Activist and Quietist. Without exhausting the range of ways of being a philosophical misanthrope, these four suffice to justify my main claim that misanthropy should not be seen specifically in terms of hatred and violence. We should attend to the varieties of philosophical misanthropy, especially since doing so reveals a deeper phenomenon I call the misanthropic predicament.

KEY WORDS: Misanthropy, Vices, Confucius, Kant, Zhuangzi

I. INTRODUCTION

MISANTHROPY is a neglected topic within contemporary philosophy, having never become one of the standard topics of investigation by moral philosophers or historians of philosophy. The professional literature includes sentimentalists, contractarians, and others, but very few self-identifying misanthropes. Among the few self-described misanthropes are David Benatar, the anti-natalist, for whom we are "*infortunati"* who suffer and inflict an "atrociously diverse" range of harms upon one another, a fact we consistently conceal with our "distracting sentimentality about humanity" (Benatar 2017: 76, 87). Otherwise, there are few self-described philosophical misanthropes and not much of a literature on that topic. Some honourable exceptions include work by Lisa Gerber (2002) and, though she doesn't use the term, Kathryn Norlock (2009).

Outside philosophy, some scholars who write on misanthropy think its absence can be easily explained. Andrew Gibson, a literary scholar, opens his book on the topic by declaring that misanthropy is "impossible," since it involves a "fundamental contradiction," expressible as a syllogism: a misanthrope hates human beings, and is themself a human being, so their stance culminates in a "profound self-hatred"—something Gibson regards as "impossible" (Gibson 2012: 2–3). Unfortunately, at no point is it explained what is impossible about self-hatred, which is not only possible in principle, but common in practice; therefore, Gibson's claims about the alleged 'impossibility' of misanthropy fail.

Gibson's claims do, however, illustrate a common conviction about misanthropy, namely that it necessarily involves attitudes of hatred for humankind or human beings. Certainly, this is the popular sense, hence the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of misanthropy as "hatred of mankind." When philosophers do discuss it, the tendency is to run with the dictionary definition and then condemn misanthropy for (a) requiring *hatred* and—typically, if not inevitably—also (b) condoning *violence* (Shklar 1984; Williams 1985). The dictionary definition perhaps owes to famous literary misanthropes, most obviously Alceste, the title character of Moliére's 1666 play, *La Misanthrope*, whose attitudes to humankind are nicely captured in the following exchange:

> PHILINTE: You say you loathe us all, without exception, and
> There's not a single human being you can stand?
> Can't you imagine any situation where—
>
> ALCESTE: No. My disgust is general. I hate all men—
> Hate some of them because they are an evil crew,
> And others for condoning what the villains do,
> Instead of treating them with loathing and contempt,
> As they deserve.

<div align="right">(act 1, scene 1, lines 115–122)</div>

If the dictionary and the playwright are right, then the concept of misanthropy involves hatred and other negative affects, like Alceste's 'loathing and contempt,' and the behaviours typically expressive of them. If so, then misanthropy seems a very unattractive concept, indeed.

In this paper, I reject the conviction that misanthropy must be characterised in terms of hatred and violence. At best that is true of some of its forms, but there are others that have a better—or, at least, different—affective and practical character. At its core, misanthropy is systematic condemnation of the moral character of humankind as it has come to be. This is a condemnatory verdict or judgment that can be expressed in a variety of distinct stances. After describing what I take to be the main misanthropic stances, the paper concludes by sketching what I will call the *misanthropic predicament*. To begin, we need a definition of misanthropy.

II. MISANTHROPY

A recent and honourable exception to the philosophical neglect of misanthropy is David E. Cooper's book *Animals and Misanthropy*. As the title suggests, his claim is that the extensive and intensive 'brutality to beasts' now integral to human forms of life is "uniquely awful," "distinctive," and "a crime of stupefying proportions," as J. M. Coetzee calls it (Cooper 2018: 77, 94, 79). Honest, sober reflection on our treatment of and comparisons with animals warrants a systematically critical verdict on our collective moral character—a claim, for the record, that I endorse, even, though in what follows, focus on Cooper's work.

Cooper's account has three aspects: misanthropy is (a) a critical judgment or verdict, (b) directed at human life, human existence, or humankind as it has come to be because it is seen to be (c) suffused with a variety of failings (Cooper 2018, ch. 1). Our ways of organising and conducting human life have become soaked through with moral and other failings. Different misanthropes focus on different failings, depending on their normative commitments and values. Most of my students, for instance, point to cruelty, exploitativeness, and injustice, though a Confucian or Christian misanthrope may want to focus on others, like insensitivity to beauty, crass disdain for tradition, or unapologetic godlessness. Some failings won't even be *intelligible* to some misanthropes and there will be genuine differences of opinion about which aspects of our world call out for condemnation. A secular naturalist with liberal values, for instance, won't see atheism and a relaxation of sexual ethical norms as a sign of moral *regress*—on the contrary, those will seem clear signs of moral progress, as advances to celebrate

Since there are many failings, misanthropes give lists of them, like the complex Buddhist catalogues of our 'cankers,' 'taints,' and 'defilements' (AN 10.174, MN 7).1 It is often useful to categorise them into clusters and correlate them to specific practices, tendencies, and goals (Cooper 2018, chs. 4 and 6). When reflecting on "the multitude of woeful examples that the experience of human deeds parades before us," Kant mentions "envy, tyranny, greed," and other "malignant inclinations" (Kant 1960, 6: 32–3 and 93–94). Elsewhere, he adds many others, like jealousy, mistrust, our propensities for enmity, and other signs of "the crooked timber of mankind." Not to outdone, Schopenhauer lists "vices, failings, weaknesses, foolishness, shortcomings, and imperfections" characteristic of human life, like "frequent and relentlessly evil gossip," "outbreaks of anger," grudges and smouldering resentments "compressed as hate long-preserved through inner brooding," and, above all, our inveterate "egoism" (Schopenhauer 2010: 205).

A misanthrope cannot simply offer lists of vices and failings, however, since otherwise the critic can employ what we might call *confinement strategies*. These are responses that accept the existence of our failings, but then seek to dampen the misanthropic verdict by confining them to unusually awful individuals or groups—psychopaths or moral monsters—or unusually awful conditions, such as the breakdown of social order during a civil war. If successful, moral condemnation is confined to specific people or periods, stopping the verdict from applying to humankind at large. To resist those confinement strategies, the misanthrope must add to the failings two features which Cooper labels *ubiquity* and *entrenchment* (Cooper 2018: 54ff). Our failings must be shown to be spread all, or almost all, throughout the human world, such that there are few if any uncontaminated spaces, and deeply entrenched into the structures, ways of life and shared projects of human life as it has come to be. They are therefore not relatively isolated or superficial features of humanity that could be quickly scraped away with a little moral effort. Think, here, of the ways that modern eco-misanthropes emphasises the ways complacency, greediness, and wastefulness have come to be baked into our social and economic systems at the most fundamental level. Such failings and their consequences have become utterly constitutive of the forms of life currently assumed by what Rousseau ironically called "civilized man" (Rousseau 1994: 94ff).

A sad truth, noted by Kathryn Norlock, is that "a world in which evils do not recur is a world without many humans in it" (Norlock 2019: 15).

If the specific content of a misanthrope's moral outlook can be diverse, so can the range of emotions, feelings, or moods which they experience, even if there is a significantly negative character to their affective profile. Alceste spoke of "hatred . . . loathing and contempt," some add despair and woe and frustration, while the environmental philosopher, Lisa Gerber, adds "mistrust, hatred, and disgust of humankind" (Gerber 2002: 41). If so, there are a range of potential affects shaping and modulating one another, rather than some single emotion, like hatred. After all, no-one's inner life is that emotionally homogeneous.

The affective dynamics of misanthropy was realised by Kant, who poignantly spoke of the "long, sad experience" of the "[f]alsehood, ingratitude, injustice," "disloyalty," and "misuse of integrity" so endemic to humanity which drive the reflections that, over time, develop into misanthropy (Kant 1997: 671ff). Schopenhauer, too, describes how experiences of moral frustration at the human world—"a den of thieves"—can promote "a melancholy mood." If it "persists," says Schopenhauer, "then misanthropy arises" (Schopenhauer 2010: 205). On this view, the aetiology of misanthropy involves an interplay between experiences, affective responses, and reflections that can, if taken seriously, culminate in a misanthropic judgment on humankind.

It should already be clear that the dictionary definition of misanthropy is in error, since hatred is only one affect among many in the makeup of the misanthrope, one that might not be present in every case. Kant speaks of colder affects, like 'woe,' for instance, while the early Daoist philosopher, Zhuāngzǐ, when reflecting on the moral realities of human life, concludes "How sad! How sad!" (Zhuāngzǐ 2009: ch. 23).[2] Some misanthropes might lack temperamental dispositions to 'hot' affects, like anger, and tend instead towards cooler affects. Others have moral or religious commitments opposed to hatred, which Buddhists condemn as one of the three "unwholesome roots" that should be guarded against (AN 5.162, MN 3).[3]

If the necessary connection between misanthropy and hatred should be rejected, then so, too, should be the idea that the verdict is aimed or targeted at *individuals*. The OED spoke of 'hating mankind,' but another popular definition characterises misanthropy as 'hatred of human beings,' which may disperse the critical charge onto individuals. Cooper rejects this, arguing that the target of the misanthropic appraisal is something *collective*—like humankind, humanity, or human forms of life as they have come to be (Cooper 2018; 8ff). Granted, some individuals stand out as exemplars of our collective vices and failings—living symbols, as it were, of all that is worst about us. (Donald Trump, for instance, was described by critics as a manifestation of arrogance, greed, and narcissism in their purest forms).

A misanthrope can single out certain individuals as exemplars of our collective failings, although also esteem some individuals. All but the sternest misanthrope can admire at least some people because they seem relatively free of the failings characteristic of the rest of us. In the famous words of an English misanthrope, Jonathan Swift, "I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth" (Swift 1843: 579). This is because those people stand out as exemplars of virtue and goodness, as people worthy of admiration,

esteem, and 'hearty love.' Indeed, they may enjoy a very special role in the lives of misanthropes as vouchsafes of the fragile moral possibilities of humankind (Gerber 2002: 54). Judith Shklar remarks of Montaigne that his misanthropic dispositions were tempered by memories of his late and beloved friend, Étienne de La Boétie:

> When his disdain for his fellow men reached such a point that even writing his essays seemed futile, he would remember his friend and that would restore him. Personal friendship was, for him, the irreducible, inexplicable experience that put a halt to nauseating doubt and contempt. (Shklar 1984: 215)

This is nothing as bland as the platitude that 'we're not all bad.' Instead it testifies to the deep melancholic dimension of misanthropy: a sense that, though our collective moral character is marred by entrenched failings, there remains a fragile and intermittently realised prospect of genuine human goodness. It may be confined to certain people, but it still remains a genuine human possibility. Certainly, moral exemplars assume various culturally specific forms, like the Confucian *jūnzĭ*, Daoist *zhēnrén*, and the sages of the Hellenistic schools (Zagzebski 2017). Strikingly, though, they are always regarded as extraordinarily rare. Kŏngzı, for one, laments he will never get to meet a *jūnzĭ* (§7.26). while the Stoics famously described sages as being like phoenixes—as rare as they are remarkable.[4]

A misanthrope also need not have any particularly strong views about human nature, even if many do. In the Western philosophical tradition, it has become common to conceive of the moral condition of humankind with reference to some philosophical or theological account of human nature, like the Christian postlapsarian doctrine of original sin. But, for two reasons, misanthropy need not entail any doctrines about human nature—other than the difficulties of articulating such doctrines. First, the historical record offers misanthropes with all manner of theories of human nature, or none at all. Augustine sees human beings as being corrupted by original sin—as moral and spiritual damaged goods—whereas one sees no such convictions in the misanthropy developed by Cooper. In classical Chinese philosophy, there were strong misanthropic tendencies—denunciations of the violence, selfishness, cruelty, and degeneration of a humankind that no longer 'follows the Way'—yoked to many accounts of human nature, some positive, others negative, some thick and some very thin, while Kŏngzı kept a steadfast silence on the subject (§5.13).

A second reason a misanthrope need not have any doctrine of human nature is that it is unnecessary for the purposes of condemnation of our collective moral character. The distinction made by Rousseau between 'natural' and 'civilized man' is crucial, here (Rousseau 1994: 94ff). 'Civilized man' has become corrupted by the artificial desires, concerns, and goals of increasingly sophisticated forms of life which provide a basis for such failings as hypocrisy, covetousness, and other manifestations of our 'wicked,' 'depraved' natures—ones utterly at odds with the peaceability and contentment of 'natural man.' The Daoists texts also argue that the escalating artificiality and complexity of human life scaffolds our failings: snobbery and contemptuousness, for instance, presuppose systems of social esteem and hierarchy, hence the irony of the Confucian moral projects involving wilful complexification of the social world (*Dàodéjīng* ch. 80).[5] Whatever the moral con-

dition of 'natural man,' what really sustains our myriad failings is the constitution of contemporary human forms of life—the current human condition, rather than our original or underlying human nature, as it were.

I think that our original or underlying nature is a separate issue from appraisal of our moral condition as it has come to be. Granted, there is a common tendency to structure reflections on our moral condition around reference to earlier stages in our biological or cultural history, whether the Pleistocene era of the Garden of Eden or the dynastic and heroic periods central to ancient Greek and classical Chinese conceptions of human history. Such historical appeals can function in two ways: retrospective misanthropes tell stories of moral decline from earlier ages of innocence and moral excellence, while prospective misanthropes draw the opposite conclusion, seeing our current state as morally inferior in contrast to what we will become in an enlightened or utopian future. But these two framings of misanthropy do not neatly pair off with optimism and pessimism. Retrospective accounts might see us as doomed to decline into the future, or they may allow for a return to that earlier and better state, perhaps pending radical interventions, like certain Christian expectations of future establishment of the Kingdom of God. Prospective accounts might offer some prospect of progress but need not guarantee it—we may, perhaps, need to initiate radical political strategies or await divine intervention.

Whether a misanthrope wants to tell an historical story or not, the point remains that any appeals to what was or may have been our original or underlying nature will remain irrelevant to appraisal of our contemporary moral condition. In a recent book, *Humankind*, the historian Rutger Bregman argues that when it comes to amelioration of the modern world, "we need to start [with] our view of human nature." Fortunately, "most people, deep down, are pretty decent," disposed to cooperation, affable sociability, and trustfulness, hence his claim that we *Homo sapiens* are really "*Homo puppies*" (Bregman 2020: 9, 2). Human nature, on this story, has become diverged from the contemporary human condition, one of greed, selfishness, and other failings. Whatever the accuracy of Bregman's anthropological claim, it is irrelevant to the question of whether modern forms of human life and existence are systematically infused with the failings identified by the misanthrope. After all, the misanthropes' claim is not that we are "fundamentally flawed," only that we are—and continue to be—contingently corrupted by the structures, temptations, and imperatives of human life as they have come to be (Bregman 2020: 137).

Actually, for all the upfront optimism, Bregman's considered claim is that we are "complex creatures, with a good side and a not-so-good side," even if "we—by nature . . . have a powerful preference for our good side" (Bregman 2020: 10).. Be that as it may, the fact is that the pressures and constraints of our world consistently overmaster whatever moral or prosocial preferences we may have, hence the awful patterns of cruelty, neglect, and other failings that Bregman periodically acknowledges but does not allow to overshadow his sunny vision of humanity (see Kidd 2020). Rather tellingly, despite making Rousseau the hero of his story, Bregman says nothing about the Frenchman's account of *amour propre* or the crucial distinction of 'natural' and 'civilized' man or the corrupting effects of complex institutions and practices (Bregman 2020: 45ff).

A philosophical misanthrope can therefore consistently condemn humanity as a whole while still esteeming certain individuals of outstanding and unusual moral attainment and also seeing others as paradigmatic manifestations of our worst collective failings. Moreover, there is no automatic need for the misanthrope to have any substantive doctrine of human nature, since their focus is on what we have come to be, rather than on what we were, long ago, and might still be, deep down.

I now turn to an account of the pluralistic character of misanthrope: of the many ways of trying to 'live out' an internalised misanthropic vision of humankind.

III. ENEMIES AND FUGITIVES

Some philosophical doctrines are abstract in the sense that adoption of them does not really change our practical comportment towards the world. If I adopt an ontological view according to which materials objects do not exist, that does not affect my practical dealings with things or alter in any way how I conduct the business of living. Other philosophical doctrines, though, have a more existentially charged character. William James observed that some start "growing hot and alive within us," until "everything has to re-crystallise around" them, altering how we think and feel and act within the world (James 2012: 142). I think misanthropy is one of these doctrines, since if it starts to become authentically internalised, one's experience of the world changes, too. One cannot live as one did before; deep and disturbing aspects of the world are now in view that cannot be 'unseen,' hence Schopenhauer's talk of the "melancholy mood" which precedes and, often, characterises a misanthropic outlook.

Adoption of a misanthropic vision of human life can, though, manifest itself in all sorts of ways. Contrary to the common fixation on hatred and violence, there are there are many ways of being a misanthrope—many ways of trying to live out an internalised misanthropic vision of the human world as one finds it. Call these *misanthropic stances*. I want to describe the four main misanthropic stances visible in the history of the Western and Asian traditions, with the provisos that these four are not exhaustive and each admits of both internal variation and combination with the others.

The first two misanthropic stances were usefully named for us by Kant, whose *Lectures on Ethics* suggest that stances are distinguished by a characteristic affect or emotion, although I think they are better distinguished practically in terms of their associated behaviours. This is because, for any set of misanthropes, what distinguishes them are not their affects, but those particular ways they act on them. A misanthrope who tries to escape the human world will be an obviously different figure from one who tries quietistically to accommodate to it, or so I will try to show in what follows.

Starting with the stances named by Kant, the first is "the Enemy of Mankind," who is at once point also called the "positive misanthrope," characterised in terms of "enmity," a combination of "dislike" of humankind and "ill-will" towards it, hence it is "the[ir] purpose and will to destroy the welfare of others" (Kant 1997, 27: 432 and 672). This is the misanthropy in the dictionary sense of hatred of humankind, the violent figure castigated by Shklar and Williams and criticised by

Kant, who declares this stance "a hateful thing," since it is rooted in "a declared disposition to do something harmful to the other" (Kant 1997: 27, 431). An Enemy of Mankind hates humankind for their vast moral awfulness, whether—to recall Alceste's diatribe—because of the 'evil' done or the practices of enablement, like condoning, looking away, excusing wrongdoing, and so on.

To express their hateful sentiments, an Enemy plots or performs acts of violence and disruption, whether physical or perhaps symbolic, like impugning humankind's dignity and ideals. Some Enemy misanthropes may hold back from committing acts violence and instead, perhaps, await or celebrate harms done to humankind (the misanthropy community on the website Reddit has posts asking, "Where is a giant meteor when you need one?") Some members of the Voluntary Human Extinction movement also welcome the prospect of our destruction. Other misanthropes urge similar grim responses, like the debates in 1880s Germany about the morality of suicide provoked by philosophical pessimists like Eduard von Hartmann (Beiser 2016: 155f, 165f).

The second misanthropic stance described by Kant is the Fugitive from Mankind, also called the negative misanthrope,' the figure who is "a recluse, who distances himself from all men, because he . . . apprehends harm from everyone" (Kant 1997: 27, 672). A Fugitive misanthrope may fear different things: the physical dangers of being among humans, or the moral risks of corruption through ongoing exposure to the human world, or the fear that to continue as a part of that world jeopardises the attainment of certain vital moral or spiritual goods. Renunciation of worldly life is central to monastic life since, as the Buddha explains, a monastic life contains fewer of the temptations and incentives that in mainstream life scaffold our vices and failings: a monastic life is *ariya pariyesana*, the "noble quest," to be contrasted with the corrupting "cesspool" of mainstream life, so contaminated with vices that it is "full of impurity" (MN 26, Sn 2.6).

Where Kant condemns Enemism as "hateful," he judges Fugitivism to be "contemptible" since though it contains no dispositions to cause harm, it is still a form of misanthropy and so opposed to *philanthropy*, the "love of mankind," which honours "*humanitas . . .* the cultivation of *humanity* as such," which is "the first duty of man towards himself" (Kant 1997: 27, 671). Kant did sometimes have a more sympathetic attitude towards Fugitivism, at one point conceding that this type "does not hate them [people], and wishes some of them well, but simply does not like them" (Kant 1997: 27, 432). All but the grimmest misanthropes can wish some of their fellows well. But it was important to Kant that people honour the ineradicable dignity owed to human beings as rational beings capable, at least in principle, of autonomous moral agency. According to the interpretation of Kant's ethics offered by Jeanine Grenberg:

The Kantian agent is a dependent and corrupt agent who, because of Kant's deep and unwavering commitment to the dignity of rational nature, needn't fall into the excesses of self-contempt'—nor, indeed, of excessive misanthropic contempt from others (Grenberg 2005: 17).

Kant ultimately resists misanthropy, on this view, since he regards it as entailing impugnment of the dignity owed to us as rational beings capable of self-conscious agency in line with the moral law.

A misanthrope need not adopt these specifically Kantian considerations, nor does one need to invoke them to raise reasonable worries about Fugitivism. A strong desire to escape a world one regards as corrupt and corrupting is perfectly intelligible even to those who do not share it. Moreover, there are various costs to such flight—practical, psychological, and emotional—of a sort that must be reckoned against the risks of remaining a member of the human world. Even if we are condemned to what Montaigne called a "unsociable sociability," we still remain sociable creatures whose activities, interests, and needs are typically best met in shared social life. Some Fugitives, for instance, escape into religious orders which afford isolation from the corrupting effects of the wider world of laypeople. Still, those ways of life entail severe limits and constraints of a sort many find incompatible with the sensuous and social dispositions of human beings. Kant also notes that some might escape to an isolated valley or distant island where one can pursue the sorts of simple, self-sufficient lives described in 'Robinsonades,' the stories about "the dream of happiness in being able to pass [one's] life on an island unknown to the rest of the world" (Kant 2000: 5, 276). But such lives are difficult and dangerous and, even when successful, lack many of the features desired by most human beings.

It's also worth noting that Kant briefly gestures to a further misanthropic stance, that of a person whom Joseph Trullinger usefully labels the "virtuous solitary." This misanthrope adopts a form of "principled solitude," taking care to periodically withdraw from a human world that inspires moral frustration and disappointment to enjoy "a kind of salutary self-isolation," meaning that the Virtuous Solitary—clearly a close cousin of the Fugitive—"withdraws from people to *avoid* misanthropy" (Trullinger 2015: 68, 70). Perhaps one retreats to a secluded space, not to 'chill out' or 'cool off' in the modern senses of taking a pause from a demanding but still acceptable world of activity and commitments.[6] Instead a Virtuous Solitary enjoys periods of respite which allow them to repair their damaged moral affection for, and trust in, humankind—preserving their commitment to *humanitas*, perhaps. Without such salutary solitary periods, the horrible prospect is an ever-growing sense that "moral life [becomes] a long, slow, painful suicide of one's deepest commitments" (Frierson 2010: 47). Here we have an interesting variant on the Fugitive stance shaped by particular features of Kant's own moral system.

IV. ACTIVISM

I think the Enemy and Fugitive stances represent two important and influential ways that one can try and live out a misanthropic vision of the world. There are, however, two problems with Kant's account. The first is his pairing of an affect to a behaviour, like the hateful violence of the Enemy and the fearful flight of the Fugitive. But this isn't warranted: the relationship of an affect to a behaviour is more contingent and variable than Kant allows. Hatred can drive us to want to do violence to a person or thing, but so can fear—we often seek to harm or destroy the people or things of which we are afraid. Fear can drive desires to flight or escape, but so can hatred, which can mean turning *away* from someone, rather than turning *on* them. Affects like anger, hatred, and fear therefore have more complicated,

conditional connections to behaviours like 'flight' and violence. Remember, too, that many misanthropes have values and commitments that proscribe certain affects and actions. The Buddhist ethical precepts, recall, proscribe hatred and violence.

A second problem with Kant's account of the misanthropic stances is that it is incomplete, because we can distinguish other ways of being a misanthrope. Granted, at no point does he say that his account is intended to be comprehensive or exhaustive, and we already remarked on the 'virtuous solitary' stance. Still, exploring misanthropy means describing at least what I take to be the main other stances evident in the history of philosophy, including those from the Indian and Chinese traditions.

A third general misanthropic stance is what one might call the Activist, whose defining feature is a resolve to respond to our dreadfulness by initiating or participating in large-scale projects aimed at the rectification of our collective moral condition. The nature of the projects depends on many contextual factors—cultural conditions, moral outlooks, the projects and resources available and the misanthrope's diagnosis of the origins or causes of our dreadful moral condition as they find it. Many modern eco-misanthropes conform to the Activist type, since they embrace ambitious goals, like 'saving the planet,' aimed at radical reform of human life as it currently exists. The environmental philosopher and activist, Rupert Read, explains the aim of Extinction Rebellion is to transform civilization, "deliberately, radically, and rapidly, in an unprecedented manner, in time to avert collapse" (Read and Alexander 2020: 40). Since radical eco-misanthropy is familiar from our own world, however, I want to focus on an earlier example from classical China.

The 'Period of the Philosophers' during which the main figures and movements of classical Chinese philosophy emerged was also the transparently named 'Period of the Warring States,' a time of violence, social and political instability, abandonment of tradition and moral chaos. Unsurprisingly, these grim realities shaped the moral outlook and aspirations of Kǒngzǐ (551–479 BCE), although interpreting him as a misanthrope may seem odd. Confucianism is usually interpreted as conveying an attractive vision of virtue, ritual excellence, and harmonious ease, although the realities are rather more complex. Kǒngzǐ laments the vast moral degradation of his culture: the atrophy of ritual conduct, wastage of talents, patterns of superficiality and duplicity, philistine disdain for cultured learning, and the wilful abandonment and corruption of the once-immaculate moral tradition initiated by the Sage Kings and perfected by the Zhou dynasty. As a distinguished scholar explains, this 'degeneration' is a result of "the panoply of basic human weaknesses," like lust and greed, and "the quality of the tradition into which one is acculturated," which in Kǒngzǐ's judgment was "severely corrupted" (Edward Slingerland in Confucius 2003: xxii). Here is a clear statement of the central misanthropic conviction that the human world, as it has come to be, is suffused with vices and failings that are ubiquitous and entrenched.

For most of his career, Kǒngzǐ opted to respond to this moral chaos with ambitious moral projects aimed at reform of that widespread degeneration. This included offering teaching to all those who desired it, promoting the restoration of rituals and music, gathering disciples to pursue and promote his teachings, seeking out receptive political leaders to offer counsel, and other ambitious Activist projects.

Given Confucianism's strongly communal character, the Fugitive mode was ruled out in advance and, though Kǒngzı sometimes expressed a desire to flee from his corrupted world, he does not regard flight as a genuine option for a moral person (§§ 5.7, 9.14). Flight is not an option: no-one "of noble intention . . . would ever pursue life at the expense of Goodness" (§15.9). Nor was Enemy-style violence and disruption acceptable, since the overall goal of the Confucian moral project was restoration, rather than destruction.

I think Kǒngzı exemplifies the Activist misanthropic stance, the practical determination to respond to our entrenched failings through muscular ambitious projects of moral restoration. If that sounds rather cheerful, the reality was rather different. Kǒngzı repeatedly voices a deep sense of frustration, resignation, and sadness directed at the condition of the world and what he increasingly saw as his failure to succeed in rectifying it; ignoring these complaints means obscuring the moral and existential predicament with which Kǒngzı was struggling (Olberding 2013). Sometimes, he voices resignation to the point of deep despair—"I should just give up!," "all is lost with me!" (§§ 5.27, 9.9). Indeed, later in his life, he scaled back his moral ambitions due to a combination of what Kant called the "long, sad experience" of painful frustration and, interestingly, a growing fatalistic conviction that moral amelioration was impossible.

In an interesting instance of cultural tradition shaping conceptions of misanthropy, Kǒngzı interprets the moral degeneration of his culture in terms of classical Chinese cosmology. The key conviction is that the condition and direction of the world was directed by *Tiān* (roughly, Heaven), an inscrutable, impersonal force that, among its functions, affects the moral conduct of human life—for instance, bestowing the Mandate of Heaven (*Tiānmìng*) on rulers and being the source of the moral energies that manifest, in human beings, as *dé* ('potencies,' 'virtues'). Kǒngzı often laments that Tiān has withdrawn the Way from the human world, depriving it of the moral direction and energy without which enduring and widespread moral excellence will become impossible (§ 9.9). In one passage, a reclusive sage chides Kǒngzı for maintaining the futile ambition of transforming the world when the Way has been withdrawn, and urges him to adopt a more modest ambition:

> The world has been without the Way for a long time now, and Heaven intends to use your Master like the wooden clapper for a bell. (§ 3.24)

In a later chapter, a disciple, Zǐlù, responds to a similar cosmological warning that the morally ambitious projects of Kǒngzı cannot succeed with a defiant statement of moral steadfastness:

> Zǐlù spent the night at Stone Gate. The next morning, the gatekeeper asked him, "Where have you come from?"
> Zǐlù answered, "From the house of Confucius."
>
> "Isn't he the one who knows that what he does is impossible and yet persists anyway?"
>
> Zǐlù then remarked, "To avoid public service is to be without a sense of what is right [. . .] To do so is to wish to keep one's hands from getting dirty at the expense of throwing the great social order into chaos. The gentleman [the mor-

ally committed person] takes office in order to do what is right, even though
he already knows that the Way will not be realized." (§ 18.7)

I will not elaborate on these remarks: my point is simply that the Activist misan-
thropy seen in the life of Kǒngzı must be interpreted in its moral, cultural, and
cosmological context. Activists draw on sources of moral hope and exploit existing
ameliorative resources in order to try and realise their ambitions. But what those
sources and resources are depend hugely on culture—Kǒngzı, for instance, draws
on his trust in the legacy of the Zhou dynasty and the rituals and cultured learning
bequeathed by them. If context shapes the content of a misanthropic vision, then
it also shapes one's sense of the possibility of, and potential paths to, amelioration.
That sense is not always there, though, as we will see with the final stance.

V. QUIETISM

The final misanthropic stance I want to describe is the Quietist stance, in a sense the
polar opposite of the Activist. Like all misanthropes, a Quietist regards human exis-
tence as it has come to be as systemically morally awful, saturated with entrenched
failings of all kinds. But their attitude is one of acceptance and resignation, and
they respond with strategies of accommodation to those failings. Recognising that
certain of their needs can only really be satisfied through continued engagement
with the human world, this misanthrope cultivates quieter, inconspicuous ways of
living that enable them to live within that world while avoiding its more corrupting
ambitions, pressures, and structures. A Quietist will, for instance, exercise virtues
such as diffidence, modesty, and reticence that guard them against the corruptions
of the human world. In terms of their lifestyle, they hold fast to relatively simple
desires and are careful when selecting and arranging their goals and commitments,
ever-watchful for signs of their being drawn into the competitiveness, preoccupa-
tions, and fractiousness of the human world.

A paradigm case of a Quietist misanthrope is Zhuāngzǐ, a leading represen-
tative of the loose group of figures later classified as Daoists. Like his classical
Chinese contemporaries, his appraisal of the world was grim: a misanthropic vision
of "dark despair," "pitiless" and "chilling" in its depiction of the "misery and sad
delusion" of typical human life (Møllgard 2007: 17ff). In contrast to the romantic
image of Daoists as chilled-out anarchists, Zhuāngzǐ denounces what he sees as
a world that has abandoned the Way. Within the increasingly artificial character
of the human world, people find themselves increasingly 'confined' by relentless
demands and pressures, oscillating between "worried" to "sad" as their life "rushes
on like a galloping horse" (Zhuāngzǐ 2009, chs. 2, 4, 24). Incapable of spontaneity
or contentment, people then ironically worsen their state by embracing the frenetic
busyness and activity of life, which supercharges such failings as greediness, hubris,
rigidity, and wastefulness. Moreover, we drift further from the Way of Heaven in a
tragic realisation of a uniquely human possibility—for 'while all other things move
spontaneously on the course proper to them,' only human beings are capable of
"stunt[ing] and maim[ing their] spontaneous aptitude" (Graham 2001: 6).

Since Zhuāngzǐ diagnoses ambitiousness and the desire to 'impose' plans and
schemes on the world among our collective failings, he obviously cannot endorse

Activist-style projects of collective reform. The sage is not "a repository of plans and schemes," and works gently but diligently at "remaining remote from all endeavours" (Zhuāngzǐ 2009: ch.7). This echoes what the *Dàodéjīng*—the other classic text of the Daoist tradition—called *wú wéi*, 'non-action,' the rejection of styles of action characterised by contrived "striving" and self-conscious goals that impair the spontaneous responsiveness through which humans emulate the Way (*Dàodéjīng* ch. 25: 43, 63).

In the Outer Chapters of the *Book of Zhuāngzǐ*, a favourite metaphor for our situation is that of "entanglement," which captures the sense of one's being constantly at risk of getting caught up in the stream of pressures, temptations, and preoccupations of the mainstream world. For Zhuāngzǐ, "there is nothing more effective than letting go of the world. When you let go of the world, you are free of entanglements" (Zhuāngzǐ 2009: ch. 19). A Quietist 'lets go' by exercising virtues like modesty and restraint, and by disciplined 'stilling' and 'emptying' of the 'heart-mind.' After all, in a dig at Confucian preoccupation with self-conscious ritualism, "if there are external things that entangle you, it's useless to come to grips with them by tying up your hands in them" (Zhuāngzǐ 2009, ch. 23).

The Quietist misanthropic stance is not confined to early Daoism, of course, since one can see it in other figures and traditions, including Buddhism and Epicureanism. Moreover, a natural consequence of successful Quietism is relative invisibility and self-marginalisation, not to draw attention to oneself, whether by Enemy-style displays of hateful violence or the noisy muscularity of Activist reformism. Moreover, quietism remains a popular option for those few contemporary self-identified philosophical misanthropes. Cooper, for one, rejects the Activist preference for ambitious world-changing goals in favour of Quietism:

> Wise misanthropes are under no illusions. It is unlikely that the world and human beings are going to change dramatically for the good, and it is anyway hard to see how you or I could contribute to such a change even if, in some manner, it came about [. . .] It is important to appreciate that quietism is not shoulder-shrugging indifference [and does not] entail the abandonment of action—of, for example, action that alleviates the suffering of some creatures. But it does mean maintaining a focus on what one can sensibly hope to achieve oneself, rather than on the prospects of big 'causes' and social movements. (Cooper 2018: 118)

A Quietist cares and acts, but on a more local, personal level. In doing so, they aim to display the sorts of cautiousness, humility, prudence, and self-restraint so palpably lacking in an ever-busier human world. There is moral commitment and seriousness, albeit of a quieter sort and on a more modest scale than is typical for many late moderns. In this sense, the misanthropic Quietist, like the philosophical pessimist, strives to cultivate what Joshua Foa Dienstag calls "a philosophy of personal conduct adapted to an unresponsive world" (Dienstag 2016: 134). A Quietist might be resigned from large-scale entanglements with a world they find morally unresponsive, but they remain morally concerned and engaged, albeit in ways consistent with a sober pessimism about the prospects for improvement.

VI. THE MISANTHROPIC PREDICAMENT

This completes my survey of the four main misanthropic stances. I say 'survey,' since it would require far more space than I have available to present these stances and 'case studies' in the detail which they deserve. It should be enough, though, to make plausible my main claim that there are no necessary connections between misanthropy, hatred, and violence. That is really an account of the Enemy stance. It does not characterise the Fugitive, Activist, or Quietist. For sure, those pursuing those stances might feel moments of hatred or be tempted to occasional acts of disruptive violence. But hatred and violence need not be a feature of the lives of many or most philosophical misanthropes. It should also be clear, though, that these four stances really are expressions of misanthropy, for each shares in a negative, critical appraisal of our collective moral condition. How they differ is in their practical behaviours: disruptive violence, determined retreat, ambitious large-scale activism, and quietist accommodations.

Finally, to repeat two earlier caveats, it isn't the case that a misanthrope necessarily gets to choose their stance. A person enters into a misanthropic vision of the world only after prior initiation into a set of moral commitments and ideals, ones that will often pre-structure one's internalisation of a misanthropic vision. The Buddha's teachings, for instance, clearly rule out Enemism and Activism and instead point a faithful Buddhist towards a Quietism-cum-Fugitivism, despite recent enthusiasm for so-called 'engaged' forms of Buddhism. Moreover, there will be variations on these stances and, doubtless, various other more marginal stances I haven't discussed. In her own accounts of misanthropy, Judith Shklar suggests there are "so many variations that it is impossible to imagine a complete catalogue of misanthropic characters" (Shklar 1984: 194). Pending a systematic study of philosophical misanthropy, we should be on the lookout for other types. But that confirms my guiding claim that, when it comes to misanthropy, hateful violence is only one type among others.

I want to conclude by repairing a misconception that may have been encouraged by my earlier discussion. If there are several stances, one may suppose that the challenge for the newly converted philosophical misanthrope is that of choosing a stance and then sticking with it. Sometimes, this is exactly what happens: some misanthropes smoothly slide into a single stance. But not always. Some people have a more complex, turbulent experience of what I will call the *misanthropic predicament*.

In this predicament, a person internalises a misanthropic vision of humanity but does not settle into a single stance. Instead they oscillate between the different affective and practical tendencies constitutive of the different stances in an existentially painful manner. A moment of enraged frustration feeds violent desires which suddenly give way to a resigned longing to escape the awfulness of the world, but one then feels the stirrings of a determined hope that things could be made better. Cheered by the warmth of that hope, one rolls up one's sleeves and gets stuck into the world, only to then—alas!—become disturbed by the singlemindedness and zealousness of other moral activists and so drifts back into a quietist resignation . . . at which point the whole unstable cycle may begin again.

Such experiences of predicament will vary in their duration and intensity and it would be a valuable activity to investigate in detail specific testimonies to them, including the two I mention below. I won't stipulate what forms these predicamental oscillations must take, and would not want to: the mutually interacting experiences, reflections, uncertainties, tensions, and determinations of philosophical misanthropes are far too complicated to admit of that. I think some misanthropes settle into some fairly stabilised style of life, which is then painfully disrupted in a way that prompts some oscillation. Others may find themselves constantly torn between different styles of life. Others may have certain rhythms that, like moods, slowly and uncertainly change over time.

Even when sketched in brief manner, it should be clear a misanthropic predicament is painful, and not simply because of its unstable emotional character. At its core, perhaps, is a deeper existential frustration: an inability to settle on some constant orientation towards the world coupled to a suitable stable self-conception of oneself, whether as a heroic Activist working to 'change the world,' or a contented Quietist living out an undramatic life, or some other set of human aspirations. For many misanthropes, this predicament really manifests in a practical uncertainty: how should I relate to the human world, given my appraisal of its dire moral condition? Should one try to tear the human world down, or escape from it, or try and reform it, or seek to live quietly within it?

A good example of someone trapped in the misanthropic predicament is Kǒngzǐ, when in his later life his commitment to Activist goals started to transform into a resigned Quietism. After decades of rejection, ridicule, and increasingly forceful rejection of his moral efforts, his outlook changed in ways nicely described by Edward Slingerland:

Confucius is determined to do his best to fulfil his mission as the "bell-clapper of Heaven," calling his fallen contemporaries back to the Way—despite his moments of weakness when he feels like throwing in the towel and going off into exile; despite his occasional doubts that Heaven has abandoned him and that his work is doomed to failure; and despite repeated failures and the mockery of his contemporaries (Slingerland in Confucius 2003: 167).

Here one sees painful oscillation between Fugitivism, Activism, and Quietism. It was marked by existentially and emotionally painful experiences of deep disappointment, frustration, lamentation, and despair. It is captured in the Confucian concept of *yuàn*, the resentment or grievance one feels when trapped in lamentable conditions that negatively impact on one's capacity to live a good life (Sung 2020: §§ 1–2).

A contemporary instance of someone experiencing the misanthropic predicament is Kathryn Norlock. In a paper tellingly titled, 'Perpetual Struggle,' she describes powerful tensions between moral hopefulness, pained resignation, impulses to act, and constant awareness of the terrible scale and effects of our collectivised failings:

[W]hen it comes to evils caused by human beings, the situation is hopeless [. . .] We are better off with the heavy knowledge that evils recur than we are with idealizations of progress, perfection, and completeness, and if we cultivate an appropriate ethic for living with such heavy knowledge, it should

> not prevent us from doing our best to resist evils, improve the lives of victims, and enjoy ourselves. (Norlock 2019: 6)

The perpetual struggle she describes has many dimensions, including a sense of the pains that accompany a sobering acceptance that our moral ideals cannot be realised given the realities of the world, a stern pessimistic conviction that amelioration on any significant scale will be a pipe dream, and a sense of the dampening effects of forswearing comforting expectations of the inevitability of progress and the attainability of perfection. It is also textured by the variety of specific resources drawn on by Norlock, mainly elements of feminist, Stoic, and pessimistic philosophy combinable into an "imperfectionist ethic" (Norlock 2019: §3).

I think that in many cases, a misanthrope will find themselves experiencing something like these predicaments. A misanthropic vision of the world is internalised, but there is not an automatic adoption of a stable and specific stance around which one can organise one's newly transformed life. Instead there is the existentially painful sense of fluxing between the stances that offers a rather grim framing of Kant's famous questions: "What should I do? What may I hope?" (Kant 1998: A805/B833). Escaping the misanthropic predicament by seeking answers to those questions one could live out is a difficult task. But it only really comes properly into view once one adopts a properly pluralistic conception of the varieties of philosophical misanthropy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ENDNOTES

1. References to Buddhist texts are to the *Anguttara Nikaya* (AN), *Majjima Nikaya* (MN), and *Sutta Nipata* (Sn).

2. References to *The Book of Zhuāngzĭ* are to chapter numbers.

3. I offer a fuller argument that the Buddhist vision of human existence as described in the Pāli Canon is misanthropic in Kidd (2021).

4. References to Kŏngzı are to book and chapter of the *Lúnyŭ*, generally known in the West by its anglicised title, the *Analects*.

5. References to the *Dàodéjīng* are to chapter numbers, consistent with the modern scholarly consensus that it had no single author, 'Lǎozǐ.'

6. For a discussion of the aspiration to 'escape from the world' in relation to misanthropy, see Cooper (2021).

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