

Response to Naomi Hodgson: The Will to Change and Morality

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I consider two points of Naomi Hodgson's paper that I am interested in. First, the willingness to listen and second, morality. I will discuss the willingness to listen and morality, and ask two questions.

DISCUSSION ABOUT WILLINGNESS TO LISTEN

I am very interested in the idea of face-to-face contact and the willingness to listen. This is found, for example, in the phrase, 'No change (education) will occur without the willingness to be so' (Hodgson, 2010). It means that a relation between the self and the other, or face-to-face relations, cannot be equal if there is not the willingness to listen.

I have two reasons for being interested in this. First, the acknowledgement of the willingness to listen is not the denial of activity. The willingness to listen does not suggest the superiority of passivity over activity, but a better relationship between passivity and activity. The idea of knowledge in Europe, for example, requires European citizens to be entrepreneurs who are active, and passivity is not considered. The reference to the willingness to listen, however, points to the importance of passivity and warns us against the ideal of the European citizen as an entrepreneurial self.

Second, the willingness to listen shows the importance of human relationships, a face-to-face relation between the self and the other. Therefore it can be seen as a resistance to a tendency toward a form of totalitarianism. Totalitarianism requires a stable economy as its basis, but as Hodgson suggests in her paper, an economy is originally not a stable entity. It occurs in the face-to-face relation between the self and the other.

DISCUSSION ABOUT MORALITY

The second aspect of the paper I will discuss is morality. In Hodgson's paper, Plato's image of 'a path upward' and a universal moral compass, as an understanding of education, is denied. Instead, 'a gleam of light over an inner landscape' becomes the indication of how to make progress (Hodgson, 2010). Moreover, the gleam of light is related to our everyday language, so the judgment, the act of deciding a direction, happens here and now. Judgment occurs within our everyday situation and, therefore, each everyday event has moral aspects: it is the object of moral

judgment.

I am very interested in the idea of morality in Emersonian moral perfectionism presented by Hodgson because of a close relation between the everyday and ‘a gleam of light over an inner landscape’. The everyday language, or reality, is full of contingency as mentioned in her paper (Ibid.). The contingency of a relation between the self and the other appears to the self as a gleam of light. That is, a gleam of light over an inner landscape is perceived contingently. Moreover, a gleam of light becomes the indication of direction, a source of moral judgment. It means, as mentioned above, the judgment made in response to the everyday fact or event is related to morality.

I have referred to two aspects of Hodgson’s paper, the willingness to listen and morality. I now want to ask two questions about these aspects. First, I question the idea of willingness.

QUESTIONS ON WILLINGNESS

As mentioned above, I also give a great importance to the willingness to listen, to passivity. It is true that no interaction and no education can occur without it, and no relation between the self and the other can be constructed, because without it the face-to-face contact cannot be made. For example, if you ignore me or do not notice me when I speak to you, you do not have any willingness to listen. To talk and have an exchange with someone, the willingness to listen and a face-to-face relation are required.

Although I support the idea of the acknowledgement of willingness to listen and its importance, I wish to question the use of the word, ‘the willingness’. I would like to ask how we might think about the idea of ‘the willingness to *change*’.

In Hodgson’s paper, the notions of activity and passivity are explained as ‘a constant willingness to question and be questioned’. The latter, passivity, is also expressed in other words, ‘the willingness to listen’ and ‘willingness to be changed’ (Ibid.). Therefore the former, or activity, can also be expressed as ‘the willingness to *change*’. I suggest therefore that by ‘willingness to be changed’ Hodgson means ‘not afraid of being changed’. Does this imply that ‘willingness to change’ means ‘not afraid of changing’? I do not think ‘*the willingness to change*’ is enough. It is true that the willingness to be changed is required in a relation between the self and the other on which citizenship is based, but I do not think the idea of ‘willingness’ is sufficient for the idea of activity, especially in the context of her discussion about citizenship. In my view, action and activity are also crucial components of citizenship: it requires a more positive mode of engagement with the other than the attitude of ‘willingness’.

I also think that the willingness to change is not enough in terms of time. Which comes first, activity (questioning) or passivity (being questioned)? The answer is obviously activity, because when the other is questioned, it is after one questions the other. Unless one intends to question, an interaction itself cannot exist. The act of questioning comes first: the moment of being questioned follows, and then an interaction, or a relation between the self and the other, takes place.

This means that when one questions, ‘the *will* to question’ is required. When he is questioned, on the other hand, he can reply to it without ‘the will to be questioned’ because all he has to do

is to reply after being questioned. He is only required to have ‘the willingness to listen’. This is the crucial difference between the active and the passive.

The idea of citizenship in Hodgson’s paper, which is related to economy, is based on a face-to-face relation and an interaction. It consists of a relation to question and to be questioned, that is, ‘the *will* to change’ and ‘the *willingness* to be changed’. ‘The willingness to change’ sounds to be too timid as an attitude to the other in a face-to-face relationship. What is required in an interaction between the self and the other is, in brief, the *interest* in the other’s words, that is, a more active mode of commitment to the other. Even if you are indifferent to someone, you can still be willing to change. I think that a face-to-face relation, or an interaction, requires both the will to change the other and the willingness to listen to the other—the interactive mode of action and passion.

QUESTIONS ON MORALITY

The second is a more radical question: What is the basis of the idea of morality in Hodgson’s paper? What is called ‘morality’ in her paper is based on Cavell’s Emersonian concept of self: ‘an unattained but attainable self’ (Cavell, 2004, p. 247). It is true that morality is explained as something unstable, vague and contingent, but if it is completely unstable, it makes no sense to use the word ‘moral’. Morality is not defined by a clear measure, but it seems certain that there is morality. What is it that qualifies morality?

I think it is a very difficult issue, so I will discuss it with reference to Kitaro Nishida’s *An Inquiry into the Good (Zen no Kenkyu)*. He says: ‘It can be said that the good is self-realization’ (Nishida, 1911, p. 192). Self-realization means the realization of one’s ideal. This implies that each has his or her own ideal and they cannot be the same. From his point of view, the problem of good and evil, or that of morality, manifests itself and is resolved in each person. It also means the idea of the good can change because one’s ideal can change. This seems similar to the understanding of morality found in Hodgson’s paper because both Nishida’s idea of the good and Hodgson’s morality are affected by contingency. They are both changeable.

However, even if the good and the evil necessarily vary from person to person, certainly there is a sense of *the* good in Nishida’s thought. He says: ‘The good is the beauty’ (p. 193), and ‘The concept of the good is consistent with that of being’ (Ibid.). The ideal, the beauty, or the being is what one’s self aims at, that is, something similar to Plato’s light, or *Idea*. In Nishida’s thought, the goal, or the ideal exists even though the ideal can change. In this sense, it can be said that *the* good in his thought exists on ‘a path upward’.

Now I return to the subject of morality in Hodgson’s paper. If ‘a path upward’ is denied, then what exists as the source of morality? Would Hodgson say that there is no such source? This is my question about morality in Hodgson’s argument about Cavell’s Emersonian moral perfectionism.

REFLECTION ON THE CONFERENCE

First of all, I would like to reflect on Hodgson's response to my question about willingness. She says that the term willingness is intended to suggest a particular relation of the self to the self—a relationship to yourself in which you acknowledge the inherent instability of yourself and the impossibility of fully knowing or mastering yourself. So what Hodgson wants to say is that we must use our critical judgment (based on some understanding of the good, which may depend upon the momentary act of judging what is preferable only here and now) concerning toward whom we should orient our willingness to listen.

Moreover, Hodgson adds that this willingness is not an explicitly decisive act that we take as a part of our identity as such. You would not say, 'Today I am going to be willing to listen, and really acknowledge my passivity in conversation with that person. This is ethically the best thing to do'. Such an act would already deny the reality of our everyday encounter in which we cannot preempt what will be said or will not be said to us: we will be affected by such encounter, which becomes the education of ourselves as human beings.

Hodgson also refers to the example of Socratic *parrhesia*. She says it illustrates a central value of education, and that it draws attention to the way in which our citizenship is enacted in the everyday, in what we say and do. Citizenship is not only something to be considered at a macro-level, for example, as the population's relationship to the state. The face-to-face interaction should not therefore necessarily be thought of in temporal terms, for we need to be addressed in conversation before a response is required of us. Such answerability is always already present in human life. Hence, as Hodgson states in her paper, Cavell's and Foucault's accounts on answerability, which is to be distinguished from obligation, shows us a better way of our moral relationships.

The following are the main points of discussion in my response paper.

- Q1. Don't you put too much emphasis on the idea of 'the will to change'?
- A1. Yes, I agree. It is probably because I stress the idea of 'change' too much, and consequently ask which comes first, the act of 'questioning' or that of 'being questioned'. An answer to that question becomes inevitably schematic and abstract. In a temporal order, of course, the act of questioning comes first. When you, however, take into consideration the presence of others, and question who those others are, the answer should become more complicating. This requires a more subtle argument, which will be my future task.
- Q2. Is the idea of 'a path upward' adequate? Wouldn't it be possible to say 'paths upward'?
- A2. You may say 'paths'. What I would like to stress, however, is not the concept of 'a path', but that of 'upward' as 'the good' and 'the beauty' exist at a higher level. Therefore what I would like to ask is whether it is possible to discuss the good and the evil without assuming something higher, or something metaphysical.

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