

Family Relation and the Philosophy of Emotion¹

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The paper aims to establish an alternative concept of family in terms of intimate feelings and affective narrative. Family relation cannot be defined in the way that traditional philosophy posits, for the set of essential properties common to all types of family cannot be found. Family can be formed in diverse manners and for various reasons. In this paper, I offer an alternative way to form family relation by making the claim to family relation by virtue of family language and intentional attitudes. Family language has the self-referring structure in which the speaker identifies himself to be a family member by virtue of making the claim. The ground for such a claim is not necessarily related to hereditary relation or judicial arrangement. Love or affection can function as the ground for the claim to family relation, supported by commitment and relevant behavioral patterns.

I classify family language as a type of speech act, specifically, belonging to the class of behabitives. Behabitives are speech acts which require the speaker to meet the sincerity condition and to perform in accord with a codified pattern of relevant actions. Thus, love or compassion or intimate feelings should be vented in order to make family relation possible and thereby the speaker makes himself a moral agent taking duty and responsibility.

Keywords: family relation, affective narrative, intentionality, sincerity condition, behabitives, speech act, intimacy, emotional structure.

Introduction

Traditionally, philosophical discourse rarely takes family as its subject. When it

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does, however, it does only to refute the universal validity of claims on family matters in the theoretical and practical sense. Fortunately, contemporary philosophy has widened its horizon and has become able to accommodate the familial in its subject matters.² In particular, since individuals cannot be viewed as detached islands anymore, any account of personal identity must include interpersonal relations and an assessment of them. In that regard, the experiences and memory of family relations become pertinent to the problem of identity. At the same time, the form of family has been through a major change, in a significant way, to the point where family is thought to be deconstructed as we live in a global and multicultural milieu. So I will attempt to show an alternative as well as a viable concept of family in terms of affective narrative and moralization.

The aim of the paper is three-fold. First, I will show how family as a concept can be construed to be an affective narrative, the narrator of which must use the identifying family language. Second, I maintain that family language belongs to a category of speech act called behabitives. 'Behabitives', coined by J.L. Austin, refer to the group of speech acts requiring both the expression of emotion and the subsequent execution of relevant actions. Third, since I take the affective narrative as the form of long-term intentional commitment, the concept of family understood as affective narrative plays inevitably a constitutive part of a subject's moral character. So I will consider the ways in which family affections can become morally accountable in the Korean family.

Is Family Necessary for Society?

Diverse notions of family or family relation have been current in different ages and societies. The notion of family can be understood as the basic unit comprising a society, the function of which is administrative, political, cultural, and economical. Despite the different connotations and weights, family as a concept generally plays a pivotal role in organizing society. If it is true that family is indispensable to society in one way or the other, what is it that makes family

2. Positive philosophical accounts of family can be found in anthologies like *Kindred Matters: Rethinking the Philosophy of Family* (1993), eds. Diana Tietjens Meyers et. al., Ithaca: Cornell University Press. In Korea, the only available instance, so far, of the philosophical treatment of 'family' as the subject matter, in book form, has been *The Philosophy of Family* (1997) by Kang, Soon-mee, et al.

fundamentally resourceful for society? I suspect that it should be loyalty or solidarity supported by psychological intimacy between family members and their morally privileged status, compared to other neighbor-denizens. Typically, family members are formed on the basis of hereditary relation, shared historical experiences as households, and psychological and economic needs. Naturally, family members form an exclusive world of their own, which makes them special to each other. Intimate feelings, affection, devotion, loyalty, filial piety, solidarity, and so on are regarded as all praiseworthy family virtues. A government can make the most of those special qualities of family relation for a more efficient ministry of state affairs. This could be a typical portrayal of family and family values.

In contrast, there have also been negative assessments of family. Plato was one of the major opponents to the family system, claiming that those seemingly praiseworthy family values are in fact the obstacle to building a rational and moral society. Specifically, natural attachment and partiality towards family members against other citizens tend to make it difficult to keep sound thinking and fair judgment when dealing with issues concerning the interest of the whole community. So Plato decided to deconstruct the family system and to run the state entirely on the basis of the principle of efficiency and impartiality.³ For such a reason and others, there should be no marriage and family allowed in his ideal community. But reproduction and nurture are to be systematically planned and carried out as part of the administrative business of the state.

Regardless of the views of how marriage and family can be assessed and implemented to public policy, one thing is common: That is, family is thought to be a special kind of interpersonal relation, centering on intimate affections and priority status. After all, it turns out that advocates and opponents alike make different assessments on the same qualities attributed to family on different grounds. Moreover, these controversies on the value of family indirectly imply the possibility of a society without families as such. Thus, we can seriously raise the question of whether family relation might well be substituted for friendship or brotherhood or something similar to a fraternity relation. For equal distribution of concern, duty, and responsibility seems to better serve individuals as well

3. Plato is thought to have attempted to dismantle the family system and subsequently labor distribution based on the notion of sex roles, especially in *Republic* and *Law* (Okin 1977:27; Heo 1997; Kang 1997:31-64).

as the whole community, due to freedom from attachment and partiality for an exclusive circle of people.

Family as an Intentional-Affective Concept

I have briefly sketched philosophical debates on the necessity of family as a basic unit of society. I have also examined the possibility of a world without families in the traditional sense and the advantages which can be brought about by such a system. Now that the existence of family as a natural kind may not be required for constituting a society, I would like to offer, in this section, an alternative concept of family. One might think that family and the familial are too familiar and close to us to define in a neat fashion. That is certainly true. Throughout human history, family took divergent forms and there were different reasons for each form. It is hard to point out the set of definitional properties of family common to all types of family. Cognitive as well as normative criteria for individuating family, such as hereditary relation, administrative system of households and the like, cannot be found. The word ‘amily’ cannot be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, as opposed to intuitive thoughts.

The more fundamental reason for the difficulty to define family is that family as a concept is an inflected or self-referring concept in the sense that the word ‘family’ or family language⁴ are included in a self-identifying utterance made by someone belonging to the family relation in question. For instance, if someone says ‘I am his son’ or ‘she is family to me’, the family relation between the two people may be confirmed only by virtue of the speaker’s self-identifying statement. In other words, the existence of family and family relation must be confirmed by someone who claims to have the family relation with the individual or the group of people. There must be a reasonable explanation for such a claim, because family relation is no more arbitrary than it is preordained.

Let me give an example of the claim to family relation on the basis of friendly feelings and trust. In the novel entitled *Fried Green Tomatoes*, which

4. ‘Family language’ refers to the words used to claim family relation. For instance, ‘mother’, ‘father’, ‘son’, ‘daughter’, ‘sister’, and ‘brother’ are typical family languages for a nuclear family system. In contrast, ‘uncle’, ‘aunt’, ‘grandmother’, ‘kin’, and so on would be included in the list of family languages for a grand family system.

appeared in film version too, Evelyn, a middle-aged woman, suffering from an eating disorder and low self-esteem, goes through some sort of see-change after having conversations with Idgie, an elderly lady living in a nursing home. Finally, Evelyn tells her husband that she feels Idgie is like family to her and so she wants to bring her to their home and take care of her. Her claim to family relation is not grounded by any legitimate and customary foundation. Her only and decisive reason for the claim is that Idgie helped her to find herself and a new vision for her life. The life-long story of love and friendship between Idgie and Ruth opens Evelyn's eyes so as to be able to realize the meaning of life and love. Moreover, Evelyn admires Idgie's sincerity and courage and wants to be with her. In this case, tender feelings, respect, friendship, and caring between Evelyn and Idgie are threads being weaved into a family relation of some sort. But these feelings are not just transient mental states. Emotions, thoughts, and desires altogether form a narrative of its own, to be classified under the heading of 'Family'.

Therefore, contrary to the commonsense beliefs, there can be no extensional boundaries for family relation. Hereditary relation does not warrant intimacy and trust between family members. On top of that, the claim to family relation is, normally, not explicitly made by direct utterances, but is implied by certain attitudes or behavioral patterns identified as proper to family members. From such external characteristics, intentional attitude or stance concerning family relation can be derived. In that sense, family is an intentional and/or implied concept. 'Being intentional and/or implied' indicates that the claim to family relation is of linguistic character and subject to interpretations. Alternatively put, family relation can be codified or conventionalized and thus fundamentally revisable. The so-called 'alternative family' is a newly formed convention of family.

Since intentionality is attributed to an agent who can use linguistic devices, the claim to family relation can be construed as a type of intentional and linguistic act. In the context of the speech act theory, types of linguistic acts amount to illocutionary acts which determine the nature of speech acts and need not be always explicitly uttered. As in 'I promise that-S', 'to promise' as a type of speech act may or may not be uttered with 'I promise that'. Depending on the circumstances, 'I will buy a dress' can imply a promise or a plan or whatever. In the same vein, one can say explicitly 'she is family to me', but sometimes one can just say 'she is my mother' or 'I love her'. The latter, which contains the family language 'mother', implies family relation between the speaker and the one referred to. What is intriguing about family language, such as 'mother' or

‘sister’, is that it contains affective nuance in a unique way. Family language is a language system which is emotionally charged and expressed. Representative feelings contaminating family language are intimacy, warmth, comfort, trustfulness, cooperativeness, loyalty, and the like, spawned by love or compassion. One of the constraints on family language is that some of those feelings should be actually felt and expressed by the speaker. In that regard, family language is intentional and affective at once.

Thus I maintain that claim to family relation can be viewed as a type of speech act in the sense that the claim may or may not be explicitly uttered, and when uttered, intentionality concerning family relation can be derived from the statement. What is more, family language has affective factors which should be felt and expressed by the speaker. In the next section, I will explain the fundamental reason why affective feelings contained in family language should be actually felt and expressed.

Sincerity Condition of Family Language

Love or compassion is usually understood as a morally good feeling and can be spontaneously aroused in the mind of a caring person with an altruistic motive. Still, it is not entirely clear whether love or compassion is founded on the normative ground. Of course, love or compassion is thought to be important in the family relation, friendship, or other personally significant relations. In order to avoid confusion, I use the term ‘family affections’ to sort out the kind of love or compassion relevant to family discourse. Family affections are often understood as synonymous with good intentions, for the intimate feeling of love or compassion can play the role of motive for a benevolent action. Construed thus, family affections can be easily associated with a person who has a natural propensity to care for others as if they are family members, because of spontaneous warm feelings towards them. In particular, family affections tend to be attributed to females rather than to males, and to mother rather than to father. In general, love or compassion is often called a female virtue, especially a mother’s. That is one of the reasons that care ethics, one of the representatives of contemporary ethics, is envisaged to be female ethics. However, I would like to contest the way that both family affections and care ethics are construed as being tied to females. As long as one takes family affections to be mainly associated with female or mothering, s/he should risk to confine family affections within the private-domestic

arena and thus to be incapable of treating it as a moralized and rationalized virtue.

Susan Mendus argues that as long as an emotion such as love remains in the private domain, it cannot be considered moral, because it is not issued by the universal principle (Mendus 2000:13-27). Love as being a transitory or pathological passion must be expanded to the public arena by virtue of transforming itself into a pattern of habituated ordinary affection. The difference between pathological love and habituated affection is that the former is a non-commitment passion, whereas the latter is a part of the regular pattern of behaviors, residing in the domain of moral norms. While love remains in the private and domestic arena, immune from equal and impartial justice, rational affection belongs to the public and political territory. The difference is made possible by the applicability of rational principle.

Then, specifically to which territory does family affections belong, private or public? It depends on the ways that one construes family affections. If one considers family affections such as intimate feeling or caring compassion as a natural impulse, then family affections may belong to the private sector only and thus have no moral bearings. In contrast, if one attempts to moralize loving compassion and thus turns it into ‘affection’⁵ governed by moral codes and social conventions, then expressing loving compassion can be part of a moral activity which can issue duty and responsibility based on the fairness of justice.

Now, what is specifically to be done in order to render family affections to be a moralized or rationalized emotion? To claim family relation on the basis of warm feelings does not warrant the moral validity of subsequent actions. In order for family affections to be morally relevant, one must make known his or her feelings in one way or other to the beloved and make sure that his or her intentions are authentic and subsequent actions are meant to be in the best interest of the beloved. Such a requirement has to do with J.L. Austin’s sincerity condition for moralizing emotions. In effect, fulfilling the sincerity condition is a way to make an emotion a public entity, not leaving it private. Loving compassion can be conventionalized in such a way that a coded behavior, like giving charity on a regular basis, can be counted as expressing compassion. As for the

5. Oatley distinguishes long-term sentiments from transient emotions. So Mendus’s notion of ‘affection’ is similar to Oatley’s ‘sentiment’ in the sense that sentiment is composed of feelings, beliefs, and behavioral commitment, while transient emotions or feelings do not have to be habituated (Oatley 2000:81).

case of expressing concern or regard, sending a greeting card might be enough. Greeting or even mourning can be an entirely conventionalized act which does not require the authenticity of the agent. But affections associated with family language are somewhat different. Since using family language constitutes an intentional-affective act and what is intended and felt needs to be communicated properly in order for the intention-feeling to be genuine, family language just remains in a non-moral arena unless sincere intentions and affections are communicated and made accountable.

From the foregoing observation, it can be concluded that the loving compassion embedded by family relation integrates both arenas, private and public, intentional and performative. In the next section, I will analyze the structure of family affections spawned by the use of family language in accord with the speech act theory and attempt to show how family affections can be moralized and accountable.

Moralizing Family Affections

Thus far I have dealt with the question of whether or not loving compassion manifested by someone claiming family relation is a moral emotion. The answer turns out to be 'yes and no'. Loving compassion instantiated by family members may be a morally significant feeling, but is not a moral feeling proper unless it is rationalized or moralized? The trouble does not lie with the fact that loving compassion is a feeling state, but with the fact that it remains in the private, domestic, and thus possibly female-mother sector only until it is backed up by relevant moral reasons for subsequent actions. Experiencing loving compassion is subjective in the sense that every emotion can be directly known only to the person who experiences it. However, experiencing love can also be a public matter, for we have a set of established codes of behaviors counted as the expression of genuine love. In virtue of those conventions, the appropriateness or inappropriateness of a compassionate or caring behavior or an attitude can be assessed in a given situation.

Now, let me talk about the act of expressing loving compassion in terms of types of speech act. Approaching moral feelings from the perspective of speech act theory can shed light on the rule, or governess of them. But 'rule' here is not meant to be something like 'principle' or 'law', like 'Categorical Imperative'. Rather, it is more like a legislated norm designed to be working for interpersonal

matters. The rules concerning the act of expressing loving compassion dictate what conditions an utterance or a behavior or an attitude can be counted as the proper expression of it. Thereby the feeling can be properly identified as morally accountable and attributed to the family member in question.

Bernard Williams discusses the function of emotion in moral judgment when he re-evaluated the weight of emotivism as a moral theory. According to the thesis of emotivism, the function and nature of moral judgment is to express the emotion of the speaker and to arouse a similar emotion in the hearer. Interestingly enough, the thesis of emotivism is only to be mentioned to be refuted by normative ethicists. However, Williams maintains that, in some cases, the agent's emotion must be felt and directly expressed to the audience in order to have moral relevance (Williams 1973:210). It is because, for some emotions, if not all, the sincerity condition has to be met in order for the emotion to be identified as such. In other words, expressing a moral emotion directly, or making certain somehow of the right source of an emotion, constitutes the moral act itself. For instance, saying sweet words is part of the manifestation of love, but it alone cannot comprise love. Insincere love is not love. In contrast, a promise uttered without intention to keep it is still a promise with bad prospects. Regardless of insincerity, the person making a bogus promise is subject to the conventional rule concerning promise making. That is to say, like it or not, one must keep one's promise once one utters words counted as a promise. But in the case of family affections showing intimacy or warmth, the sincerity condition has to be met in order to make 'the relevant emotion' possible in the first place. Generally, morally relevant and 'real' emotions are subject to the sincerity condition and family affections are one of them.⁶

Williams notes that expressing emotion is not required by every moral judgment. But he maintains that in some cases, proper moral judgment must be backed up by the expression of emotion (Williams 1973:218). Emotions like contempt, praise, compassion, and the like must be expressed for a relevant moral judgment, together with relevant actions. In cases like these, we can see some unified structure among emotion, moral judgment, and action. This could

6. The reason I specify 'real emotion' here is that we can experience an emotion but need not always express it, like when we appreciate a work of art, say, a novel. Such emotions that we experience in that case should be called 'art-emotion'. Art-emotion is not a bogus emotion, but it is not subject to the sincerity condition. For art-emotion does not have to be connected to a subsequent act. Cf. Feagin 1996:190-204.

imply that a general disposition must be established for a moral agent. Such disposition is often identified with moral character, which can in turn support the sincerity condition of moral judgment and emotion. Williams calls such a unified structure or disposition 'emotional structure' (Williams 1973:222), underlying the agent's linguistic and behavioral manifestations. In virtue of such an emotional structure, can we make sure of the sincerity of his moral judgment?

If the unified relation between emotion, moral judgment, and relevant action can be thought to comprise a specific moral act, the unity requirement amounts to the rule-following for the establishment of an act of expressing moral emotions. Saying this much, I think, sufficiently shows the rule-governed nature of family affections, the prime instances of which are love or compassion. J.L. Austin uses different terms in classifying divergent speech acts. According to his terminology, expressing emotion belongs to the group of *behabitives* (Austin 1965:79, 159). 'Behabitives' are utterances that are not merely conventional. They need to be performed with a sincere intention. Behabitives include reactions to other people's behaviors or attitudes, and their fortunes, as well as venting feelings. Here, we can see some sort of unity similar to Williams' notion of 'emotional structure'. I think that the term, emotional structure, can be exchangeable with 'moral virtue' in that a morally virtuous person develops a behavioral pattern, based on good intentions. As such, the emotional structure of a moral agent reflects the depth of his understanding, his attitude towards the situation or people concerned, and the keenness of sensitivity.

Drawing on the sincerity condition of a moral emotion informs us that moral judgment cannot be made in terms of principles or universal validity only. Merely abstract, categorical imperatives or the principle of utility cannot accommodate diverse human needs or conflicts. In a culturally diverse society, cultural tradition, religious beliefs, personal preferences, and gender differences can make a big difference when a moral agent willingly issues love-bound actions to other people. One cannot rely on a general and abstract formal guideline when dealing with practical problems, such as nurturing children, preparing for a career, giving birth to a child, and the like. Cognitive and psychological sensitivity to contextual and individual particulars are needed. The reason that loving compassion is often required for interpersonal or inter-communal conflicts is, I think, not because a good intention itself helps, but because beneficiaries of morally good acts need to know the sincerity of such an intention. Otherwise, the seemingly benevolent actions can cause more conflicts and intrusions. Hence, making known to the beneficiary the sincerity of intentions of the com-

passionate agent is a constitutive part of the act of expressing moral emotion. If the condition is not met, then subsequent acts may not be counted as compassionate acts.

Moral Significance of Family Relation

I have examined the constitutive components of expressing moral emotions as a type of speech act and concluded that the sincerity condition must be met in order for a loving or compassionate act to be made possible at the outset and also to be identified as such. To a certain degree, expressing love or compassion is shown to be bound to some implicit but coded rules. Such findings can open the possibility of enacting family affections, exhibited by ‘caring acts’, as morally relevant. However, care ethicists seem to oppose the prospect of generalizing ‘caring’. Stressing on the particularity of the issues and contexts of moral judgment, for instance, Virginia Held suggests that feminists adopt the model of the Mother-Child relationship rather than that of Male Ruler-State relation in interpersonal relations. She even suggests ‘a division of moral labor’ (Held 1987:110) which refers to the divided domains assigned by the different models of morality. The Male Ruler-State model treats individuals as isolated strangers and pursues the best outcome from a rational choice under the guidance of universalizable principles. She thinks that the model prefers the state to individuals and family. In other words, the so-called justice-governed society is in fact run by the principle of the marketplace. Such an approach tends to disregard the individuality of people and contexts, on behalf of abstract principles and an ultimate outcome. To make it worse, principle-centered ethics can dispose the nature of morality itself. Held says, in a different place, that moral experience is “the experience of consciously choosing, of voluntarily accepting or rejecting, of willingly approving or disapproving, of living with these choices, and above all of acting and of living with these actions and their outcomes” (Held 1984:343). Any ethical accounts or claims cannot be moral unless it is detached from human experiences.

Despite her emphasis on particulars, Held tries to keep a balance between theory and practice. In that regard, she is distanced from Nel Noddings’ version of care ethics. While Noddings emphasizes caring practices in a situated context, Held vindicates theory as indispensable. I won’t go into the specific arguments on the validity of care ethics. My concern lies in the possibility to moralize fami-

ly affections, which are usually viewed as the personal virtue of caring persons. As I have shown above, family affections like a mother's caring love may or may not be rationalized or moralized, depending on whether or not the sincerity condition is met. As lamentable as it may be, caring love or compassion has a peculiar backsliding. For instance, when a compassionate person observes the disastrous living states of the less fortunate, he or she may feel totally disabled and thus desire to become indifferent (Berlant 2004:9). The desire to turn around in that case amounts to the denial of one's moral accountability. The unified structure of a moral emotion can thereby be broken. So a would-be loving intention may turn into sadism of some sort. Therefore, a compassionate agent must remind himself or herself of the obligation not to turn (Berlant 2004:7), which is needed to moralize his or her own compassionate feeling.

I expand on Williams' sincerity condition and add two auxiliary conditions for family affections. First, love expressed by a family member must be sincere, that is, the agent must be aware of his or her own affections. Second, affections must be communicated properly to the beloved and identified as such. What is intriguing about expressing moral emotion is that the expressiveness of affection itself can make rules for affectionate behaviors—for instance, by spending time with elderly people. Moreover, externalizing affections into a socially accountable form makes the agent a moral agent, not just a compassionate person. For, by expressing love or compassion and thus making his or her intention known to the beloved, the agent makes himself or herself morally accountable in terms of duty and responsibility. In other words, expressing compassionate love generates moral rules.

Then, how can the foregoing account of love or compassion be relevant to family relation? What is going to happen after a loving or compassionate agent makes known that his or her intention is sincere and he or she is going to devote himself or herself to caring or benevolent actions for the beloved? What makes his or her actions morally valid? I think that at this point, it is useful to look at Katzenstein and Laitin's suggestion. Basically, they are convinced of the notion of moral progress. They present three criteria to assure the moral soundness of caring. First, moral claims must "portray the group's social and political role in a dynamic, not static manner." Second, a moral agent must "seek to nurture and promote diversity across its ranks and to remedy differences in mobility prospects vertically among its members." Third, the political project of the group must involve "entry into alliance or historical bloc that is committed to the expansion of opportunities and political power for other disadvantaged classes

or groups” (Katzenstein and Laitin 1987:265).

Also, Martha Nussbaum’s therapeutic model in regard to the practical goal of philosophy is spawned from a similar motive. In order for the account of compassionate love for family members to be morally relevant, it must pursue the ways to promote the remedy from human suffering of any kind. In order to achieve such goals, a loving or compassionate agent must be aware of the needs of intimate interpersonal relations and mutual support of various kinds. In particular, family members must find the ways to develop human capabilities of every kind, including moral deliberation, self-determination, and emotional responsiveness. The sincerity condition of love or compassion must be expanded to that point.

How Can the Sincerity Condition Be Met in Family Relation in Korea?

Typically, Koreans are reticent and reserved in front of people. Contrary to that, the younger generations (those who do not necessarily commit themselves to Confucian behavioral norms) seem to be very good at expressing themselves. They want to communicate their own thoughts and feelings and to be received well. One of the reasons the older generations (those who more or less follow Confucian behavioral norms) do not tell about themselves to family members is that they assume their affections are somehow known to be true or understood by other family members. In the traditional Korean family, Confucian codes of conduct are presumed to be working and so do not have to be expressed often on the interpersonal level. In a global and multicultural society, however, family can be formed for divergent reasons. Today, psychological factors like intimate feelings, the sense of belongingness, the need to be safe, and so on, play the major role in forming family relations. Interpersonal relation as family members based on such dispositions are the products of individual choice and commitment. Therefore, the sincerity of favorable intentions needs to be communicated and identified as such. Given that divergent codes of conduct are working underneath external behaviors these days, the authenticity of affectionate feelings needs to be explicitly reconfirmed more than ever. Saying ‘because I love you’ or ‘you are my darling Mom’ would be enough for that, sometimes.

Conclusion

I have attempted to portray love or compassion as a central point of family relation as well as the need to moralize or codify love or compassion in order to make it morally relevant. To specify the rule-governedness of love or compassion as a moral emotion, I use the speech act theory and locate the expression of love or compassion in the group of habitives, as coined by J.L. Austin. The rules or codes for expressing compassion are not like pure principles, detached from the actual contexts. They are more like recipes or remedies for the betterment of human conditions. Moral accounts of family relation need to be equipped with therapeutic means of some sort as well as good intentions.

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