



Human responsibility: A universal moral reading of three contemporary poetic works

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Abstract

This article presents a universal moral interpretation of an individual modern poetic trilogy that follows progression via clarity, turmoil, and finally compassion. Instead of referencing poems with respect to cultural tradition, the analysis contextualizes them with respect to universal human experience that is evident along various cultural traditions of philosophy and psychology. The analysis shows that an individual poem represents a unique phase of moral development, from clarity/inner foundation, turmoil/ethical testing, towards compassion/compassionate ethics. The analysis contextualizes the trilogy via virtue ethics, Confucianism, existential psychology, care ethics, and universal moral philosophies, demonstrating how the trilogy itself represents a universal moral progression without reducing the poems to cultural exemplars. The analysis demonstrates how poetry itself represents universal human ethical conditions and how the structure of the trilogy follows a universal human attempt to understand moral obligation via a world that is filled with suffering, fragility, and hope for care.

Keywords: Universal Ethics, moral psychology, contemporary poetry, compassion, cross-cultural philosophy, ethical development

Introduction

Poetry has represented an opportunity for human beings to think about themselves and the obligations that they possess towards each other. This is particularly true for the three modern poems studied here: “Where Clear Light Finds Its Rest,” “Shadow in Turmoil, Clarity Returned,” and “Heaven’s Mercy for the Helpless.” The poems, while finding inspiration for form and style from classical models, owe most of their import to the manner in which they deal with issues that are part of the human condition and not restricted to any given cultural inheritance. This article suggests that the trilogy shows how modern poetry can express ethical structures beyond the bounds of given cultures and proves that moral thoughts expressed by poetry have something universal about them that has nothing to do with the cultural attributes that are assigned to them. The trilogy traces the moral arc from the search for clarity, into the fire of turmoil, and out into compassion.

The research aims to fill a gap in the existing literature by demonstrating that it is possible to read contemporary poetry along a universal moral and psychological spectrum, rather than in the cultural/historical terms which often otherwise prevail. The trilogy, though written in a contemporary voice and style, engages with moral concerns which are perennial and continue to affect and direct human experience. Though written in a contemporary voice and style, the trilogy engages with moral concerns which are perennial and continue to direct and affect human experience.

Universal and cross cultural are somewhat similar but distinct forms of analysis. The former does not imply that human understandings or moral trends are the same in every culture. It highlights the fact that human experiences pervade a number of cultures in a similar way. Cross cultural analysis examines different cultures, and a universal analysis highlights the moral experiences that allow cultures to be compared. This study’s use of the universal point of view allows the poems to be interpreted without relation to the cultures they express. It does so by skipping the analysis

of the cultures as they are represented in the forms of the trilogy. This would be the focus of a cross cultural analysis. This happens in such a way that the analysis would limit the scope of the trilogy to specific cultures.

Unlike universal reading, the universal and the cross-cultural reading diverge not in content but in methodology. In the case of cross-cultural reading, one may see, for example, how Aristotle’s phronesis of balanced judgment may be compared to the importance of attentiveness and sincerity as bases of moral clarity in Confucian teachings. Thus, cross-cultural reading prompts one to see the differences and similarities between and within different traditions. Universal reading does not engage in the comparison of traditions with one another at all. Instead, it is dedicated to the human experience that allows the comparison of traditions to take place, such as the psychological experience of clarity as the gentle, open state that transcends cultural boundaries to be seen in different ways.

This ideal of seeking clarity is a philosophical ideal that exists within various streams of philosophical thinking. Aristotle explains the use of practical wisdom in terms of stabilizing oneself in a way that makes clarity and judgment possible. Confucian philosophical ideas discuss clarity in terms of moral attention, whereby the individual becomes capable of responding through a form of sincerity and balance. Existential philosophical ideas, as explained by Frankl, discuss the development of clarity as the point of finding meaning regardless of the challenge faced. The first poem resonates with the philosophical concepts of clarity in the manner it explains the ideal of clarity in terms of a quiet space.

The second poem shifts to address the theme of turmoil. Turmoil has been recognized for many years as an impetus for moral understanding. Moral psychologists point out that turmoil of any kind can underscore the boundaries of perception and prompt the self to confront its own fragility. Philosophers like Levinas argue that instances of disorientation can prompt the self to openness to other and

to normativity. Everyone has experienced the disorienting feeling of being amidst shadows, the imagery of shadow and fragmentation arises commonly out of everyone's experience of turmoil and then being challenged to bring order out of it.

The last poem is concerned with the world outside the self, with the lives of those who suffer. Many ethical systems center the lives of the vulnerable at the core of the moral universe. Care ethics highlights the need to address the vulnerable those who have no protection [Gilligan]. Humanistic philosophies point out that the beginning of ethics is recognizing another's need, just like yours [Nussbaum]. Others, like Singer, describe ethical advance as an expansion of the circle to include the voices or needs that are easily neglected or overlooked in the world [Singer]. The concentration on widows and orphans in the poem echoes a globalized moral vision, where compassion is the natural outcome of clarity and strife.

These three parts collectively may be seen as a moral arc that begins with self-understanding and ends with ethical responsibility. The following article seeks to understand these poems from a universal perspective, based on information from philosophers, psychologists, and ethical traditions across the globe. The intent is not to align any of these works with any civilization's cultural background, but to see how they collectively reflect a common human quest to understand how to be ethical in a world that is full of both suffering and opportunity.

Methodology and Conceptual Framework

This study of the trilogy employs the methods of close reading, comparative ethics, and moral psychology. These methods enable the reader to interpret the trilogy not only as a work of poetry, but also as a work of philosophy informed by the experiences of human culture at large.

The basis of the analysis is obtained from close reading. This method specifically looks at the language, imagery, rhythm, and structure found in the poems, which is significant for poetic expressions. This method recognizes each poem as a work of art that requires analysis based on the details and imagery used. This method is based on the tradition of analyzing literature, which holds together the form of poetry and philosophy. The change in tone, movement, and imagery of the trilogy is seen as significant for the analysis of the moral journey of the poems.

Comparative ethics provides a second tier of interpretation. Ethical contemplation has been pursued in many different cultural traditions, though universal problems and questions are apparent. The quest for clarity has parallels with the development of practical wisdom in the thoughts of Aristotle [Aristotle]. Faced with turmoil, the poems share parallels with the ideas of Confucius [Confucius] and the search for meaning in the ideas of Frankl [Frankl]. Turning towards vulnerability has resonances with care ethics [Gilligan], humanistic philosophy [Nussbaum], and recent debates on the extension of ethics [Singer]. This broadens the discussion of poems within a global community of ideas. Moral psychology provides the third element of the interpretative framework. Research in this area makes it apparent that clarity, disturbance, and empathy are not abstract concepts but living psychological processes. Investigations into moral judgment uncover how emotion and intuition come to frame ethical perception [Haidt]. Theoretical arguments from individuals like Levinas

describe the ethical awakening involved when a person confronts the suffering of another [Levinas]. Such insights serve to illuminate the trilogy's movement from inner steadiness through moral responsiveness. Poems are thus read as literary expressions and as indicative of states of mind that position individuals for ethical action.

This study treats psychological processes as the lived conditions that give philosophical insights their practical force, allowing the poems to be read as reflections of both ethical thought and human experience.

The techniques of analysis work together to shift the focus smoothly between the inner structure of the poems and the overall moral issues that are explored. The intention is that, rather than attempting to force one and only one system of philosophy on the poems, there is an exploration of how the poems connect with a variety of human experiences. The trilogy is seen as an exploration of the moral progression of self-discovery, dislocation, and finally, responsibility to suffering. This sets the context for the following parts of the analysis, each of which looks at one of the stages.

Clarity as Inner Grounding

As one would expect from a Trilogy of poems exploring a subject, the opening poem offers a vision of clarity as a state of inner sharpness. The opening poem does not suggest clarity as a moment of revelation, a moment of transformation. It is a vision that arises after a receptive state of mind has been established. This is an understanding that aligns with a number of philosophical traditions that suggest clarity is an attitude, an internal state, and not a moment that happens by accident. The following discussion cites one philosophy with depth and then refers to those traditions throughout so that the argument does not repeat itself while maintaining its clarity. The poem is not simply an expression of philosophies but a reinterpretation, offering clarity as a moral state instead of a religious state.

In virtue ethics, this concept of clarity is related to the cultivation of practical wisdom. Aristotle talks about practical wisdom as something where, in any situation, there is clarity of perception and consideration. It is not the product of force and strength but develops through the refinement of attention. The overall imagery presented in the poem of stillness and clarity represents this concept of practical wisdom. In this process, there is clarity when there is calm and when the mind is cleared to see things properly. The poem offers a new understanding of practical wisdom as related to quiet reflection.

A similar understanding is present in classical Confucian philosophy. The Confucian philosophical school highly values attention and sincerity as a basis for a moral life [Confucius]. Clarity is not just cognitive but also has a moral aspect, because it enables a person to behave toward others with authentic care. The poem echoes this idea by offering clarity as a state in which one is ready to engage with the world in a significant way. In this sense, the poem changes Confucian attentiveness from a socially oriented concept to a state oriented inwardly before ethics become applicable.

Moreover, existential literature authors usually express their ideas regarding clarity regarding a qualitatively grounded state of awareness. According to Frankl, meaningfulness becomes manifest as the individual turns towards life with openness, even during tribulations [Frankl]. Hence, clarity is not a state of being without tribulations but is, instead, being

steady in those tribulations. This is also reflected in the calm tone that underlies the poem and which expresses clarity as an altered understanding of the existential theme of steadiness and being able to accept the world without any fear.

Moral psychology also supports this reading with further evidence. Psychological research has demonstrated that calm states of attention help improve moral judgment by checking impulsive actions and promoting more thoughtful decision-making procedures [Haidt]. In fact, the imagery of a settled light used to represent clarity in the poem follows this psychological observation. Where there is psychological calmness, precise perception and moral awareness are possible. In addition, the poem's representation of clarity follows this psychological process by indicating that it emerges out of psychological calmness and not out of intellectual struggle.

What the first poem accomplishes is the foundation for what the trilogy's moral development is. Clarity here is how the individual can ground themselves and look at the world from an honest and open place. Clarity is not an end of itself. It is the start of a process, a journey through tumult and toward compassion. There is confidence in the first poem to indicate how precarious and essential a state of clarity must be for the individual to finally respond to the suffering of others.

Turmoil as Moral Testing

The second poem of the trilogy eliminates the serene ambiance of the first poem and enters a place full of agitations, as evidenced by the imagery of shadows, fragmentation, and movements. There is an evident shift from peace of mind to restlessness, the former of which is common human nature. At some point, people are aware of things they are doing, but the situation is only temporary since it is followed by situations of incomprehension, the true test of any individual.

Major philosophical ideologies across the globe agree on the notion of turmoil leading to a form of self-improvement in terms of morality. Confucian belief on morality indicates that it is an ongoing process of responding to the challenging circumstances that disturb the self's equilibrium [Confucius]. Therefore, the poem is identifiable with the line on the scattering of thought due to the scattering of the shadow in turmoil. Here, turmoil depicts the moment of self-confrontation of one's own vulnerability, as depicted on the deeper meaning of the poem on the self's dependency on clarity.

There is a similar perspective from the school of existential philosophy. In this school of thought, Frankl posits that humans find meaning, not in comfortable situations, but in the struggle to maintain some orientation when things become difficult. Turmoil exposes the limits of one's own control and necessitates that the self come to acknowledge its own dependence on something greater than its own desires. Fragmentation imagery is reminiscent of insight and self is portrayed as a jumble of desires, but the poem indicates that order may be regained if the self remains open to the potential for renewal.

A review of moral psychology also offers additional support for such an understanding. Empirical studies have demonstrated that emotional disturbance is a precursor to moral insight. When a person is perplexed, they would be more aware of their underlying beliefs that guide their decisions and behavior [Haidt]. This is why the progress from chaos to clarity, as seen in the poet's work, reflects a

similar trajectory. The state of turmoil is therefore not definitive, but a step that ushers morality.

Further to this understanding, Levinas contributes another layer. He suggests that there is a possibility that our awareness of ethics comes from those instants where we are disturbed by another person's presence and pain [Levinas]. Here, turmoil is not just progressively internal but relational as well. It captures the fact that a person realizes their comfort is not necessarily a measure of the world. The image of shadow from this piece of poetry would metaphorically carry this meaning. Moreover, turmoil is not just a personal upheaval but indicates the call to transcend from our own perspectives.

The second poem, therefore, assumes a significant position in the moral trajectory of this trilogy. It shows how clarity is unfixed and how it is important to learn to understand confusion without losing sight of oneself. Turmoil, therefore, is a form of trial through which the mind is prepared to accept the moral imperatives expressed in the last poem. Quite obviously, through its presentation of turmoil as not just mental but also ethical, this poem implies that to walk the path of responsibility, one must first experience moments of uncertainty so that there is clarity not in terms of the self but others.

Compassion as Ethical Maturity

The three poems create a unitary moral sequence that corresponds to shared experiences. The unity of the moral sequence depends on a pattern that is common in moral experience. Clarity is perceptually grounded because it calms the mind and enables one to see clearly without any distortion. As next turmoil follows the point at which the grounding achieved through clarity is challenged and its boundaries established, which is a prerequisite for greater self-understanding. Compassion stands as the final stage due to that moral understanding complete only when it turns from the self to the needs of others. These three stages constitute a universal sequence in which self-calming, difficulty, and moral responsiveness follow one another.

Each poem is a different part of a larger poem on ethical journey. They form a unified arc that moves from merely self-understanding to responsibility toward others. This progression is not tied to any particular single philosophical tradition, rather it echoes themes found in care ethics, virtue ethics, existential thought and moral psychology which is contemporary. The trilogy therefore offers a poetic expression of a universal moral path.

The trilogy also functions as a unified poetic form. The poems form a classical triptych and intertwine in inseparable way. The progression from inner grounding to turmoil and finally to compassion mirrors long standing traditions of spiritual and philosophical cultivation. self-moves from introspection to testing and then to ethical openness. In placing the poems in this sequence, the work presents not only three individual reflections but as a single unfolding path that gains meaning through its ordered progression.

The first stage is the search for clarity. The opening poem presents clarity as a quiet state in which the mind becomes receptive and grounded. This understanding aligns with the cultivation of practical wisdom in Aristotle's ethics [Aristotle], the Confucian emphasis on attentiveness [Confucius], and the existential recognition of meaning described by Frankl [Frankl]. Clarity is portrayed as a condition that allows the self to see the world without distortion. It is the foundation upon which moral life is built.

The second stage is the confrontation with turmoil. The middle poem introduces shadow, fragmentation, and agitation. These images reflect the universal experience of being tested by confusion and conflict. Moral psychologists describe such moments as opportunities for deeper reflection and growth [Haidt]. Philosophers such as Levinas argue that disturbance can open the self to ethical awareness [Levinas]. The poem’s movement from agitation to restored clarity mirrors this process. Turmoil becomes a necessary stage in the development of moral insight.

The final stage is the turn toward compassion. The last poem shifts the focus from the inner life toward suffering of others. Paying attention to widows and orphans places a global ethical orientation that places the vulnerable at the center of moral concern. Care ethics shows the importance of responding to those who cannot protect themselves [Gilligan]. Humanistic philosophy describes compassion as an intelligent and morally significant emotion [Nussbaum]. Singer’s account of moral progress highlights the expansion of concern to include those who are often overlooked [Singer]. The poem’s solemn tone and focus on the helpless align with these perspectives. Compassion becomes the culmination of the moral journey.

When read together, the three poems reveal a pattern that is both literary and ethical clarity prepares the mind. Turmoil tests it. Compassion completes it. This arc reflects a universal understanding of moral development. It suggests that ethical maturity does not arise from abstract reasoning alone. It represents struggle, grounding and recognition of suffering. The trilogy thus offers a poetic articulation of a moral path that resonates across cultures and philosophical traditions.

Many ethical traditions confirm the value of clarity, turmoil, and compassion. While some others conceptualize these experiences in different ways. Stoic philosophy considers emotional upheaval not as a source of moral wisdom. Merely a distraction that should be steadied and reduced through clear thinking and self-control. Buddhist traditions often ground compassion not in moral responsibility but in the realization of non-self.

Care for others naturally after dissolution of ego rather than a duty itself. These perspectives do not undermine the trilogy’s moral arc. Instead, they highlight the plurality of ethical pathways through which human beings understand inner steadiness, struggle, and responsiveness to suffering.

Synthesis: A Universal Moral Arc

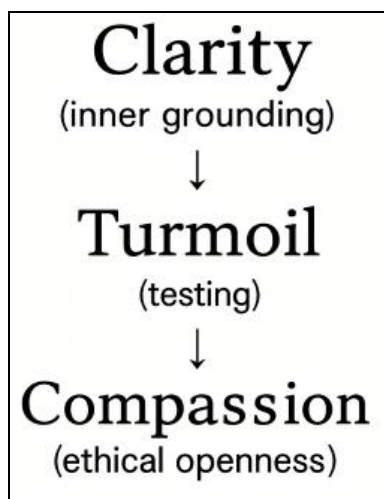


Fig 1: Moral progression in the trilogy: clarity, turmoil, and compassion as a universal ethical sequence

The structure of trilogy represents a moral progression which mirrors human experiences. Each poem contributes a distinct movement of clarity to perceptual steadiness, turmoil to steadiness and compassion to ethical responsiveness. Rather than repeating the detailed analyses of the previous sections, this synthesis highlights how these stages interlock to form a unified moral arc.

Poems operate as a triptych in which each panel depends on meaning of others. The first poem’s quiet grounding provides the perceptual and emotional conditions necessary for moral life. Second poem disrupts this ground by demonstrating that clarity is not static but rather withstand confusion, fragmentation and ethical challenge. Final poem completes the arc by turning outward, showing that moral understanding matures only when it recognizes and responds to vulnerability.

Sequence resonates across multiple philosophical traditions although not explicitly belonging to any of them. Cultivation of stable perception, existential thought highlights meaning discovered through struggle, and care ethics centers the needs of the vulnerable are in virtue ethics. The trilogy does not reproduce these traditions but echoes their shared insight: ethical life unfolds through a movement from inner steadiness, through testing, toward responsibility.

Known fact that Stoicism and Buddhism often represent clarity, turmoil and compassion in differently. Presenting in the broader philosophical landscape underscores that while the trilogy’s arc is universal in structure, not in universal interpretation. The poems articulate one compelling version of a moral journey that many traditions recognize, even if they conceptualize it in different ways. Trilogy presents a modern poetic articulation of a moral path that is recognizable across cultures in grounding, struggle and ethical openness. Universalism is not neglecting cultural differences, but in expressing experiences that recur across human life.

Conclusion

The trilogy examined in this study “Where Clear Light Finds Its Rest”, “Shadow in Turmoil, Clarity Returned” and “Heaven’s Mercy for the Helpless” traces a moral journey that covers philosophical traditions and cultural boundaries. Each poem contributes a distinct movement in the development of ethical awareness. As a whole they form a progression that moves from inner grounding to outward responsibility. The poems draw on experiences that are widely recognized in human life. The searching on clarity, the struggle through turmoil and the recognition of the suffering of others.

First poem represents clarity as a quiet steadiness which allows the mind to perceive without distortion. Understanding echoes the cultivation of practical wisdom that Aristotle pointed out, The Confucian emphasis on attentiveness and sincerity. Calm imagery of the poem positions clarifies as the foundation of ethical life and as the condition that prepares the self for deeper moral engagement.

Second poem addresses turmoil as a necessary component of ethical development as times of confusion and disunity through compelling the self to confront its own limitations to regain its bearings. Moral psychology observes that such disturbances tend to enhance reflection, whereas existential philosophy views them as opportunities to recover meaning.

The poem shows transition from turmoil to understanding in this process.

Final poem is on compassion and places widows and orphans at its center of focus. It addresses a universal moral truth that responsibility begins with another people's vulnerability recognition. It is known that care ethics emphasizes the importance of those who cannot protect themselves and humanistic philosophy addresses compassion as an intelligent and morally significant emotion. The poem's quiet tone presents compassion as the final stage of the moral path. This is inner understanding that turns into action toward others.

Resulting moral maturity is the outcome of intertwine between clarity, struggle, and compassion as is illustrated in Figure 1. Trilogy's narrative structure confirms that clarity, struggle, and compassion are a universal sequence of moral events. Clarity is the preparation of the mind to view the world in a truthful way. Struggle is the test of the power of that clarity. Compassion is the transformation of insight into responsibility. This sequence has been identified in all moral traditions. But the poems communicate this pattern in a modern voice that is still responsive to common human experience. The trilogy of poems indicates that poetry is a contemporary and effective means of examining the moral aspects of life and of reminding readers that responsibility is not a concept, but a practice that is shaped by attention, struggle, and compassion.

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