

孟子

2. Mengzi (“Mencius”)

Kongzi’s proposals, about the proper shape and meaning of human life, and the path one must travel to get there, soon generated widespread and intense debate. A variety of different thinkers came forward to propose alternative pictures of how society should be organized and how people should live their lives. Kongzi’s passing marked the beginning of a three- to four-hundred-year period profoundly rich in social, ethical, political, and religious thought. In terms of the variety of views presented, it is arguably without parallel in human history.¹ Prominent among the opponents to Kongzi’s vision were two groups: the followers of Mozi (the *Mohists*); and the followers of Yang Zhu.

The Mohists² objected to many aspects of the Confucian vision, but perhaps most importantly, they argued against the Confucian claim that our moral sense must develop in relation to and remain partial to our immediate family members. In direct opposition to this central Confucian claim, the Mohists argued that we should show equal and impartial care for all people.³

Mozi and his followers had a rather thin picture of human nature and as a result a relatively simple view of moral psychology.⁴ Not unlike Socrates, they believed that people were highly rational creatures, and that a well-turned argument would have an inexorable pull on any person who could follow its course. As a consequence of this aspect of their views, they paid a great deal of attention to the form and method of argumentation, resulting in considerable advances in logic, mathematics, and optics, among other disciplines.⁵ The Mohists also shared the widely held belief that people would respond in kind to the treatment they received and that most people had an innate tendency to defer to and try to please their superiors. For those who would not respond in any of these ways, the Mohists made an additional, more coercive, appeal to the role that ghosts and spirits play in maintaining justice in the world. Given these various views about human nature and ethical motivation, the Mohists were led to condemn Confucian ritual and cultural practices, such as music, as pointless and extravagant.

The Mohists are best described as materialist, state consequentialists. Like other consequentialists, one of the great strengths of their position is the clear criteria they offer for what is right and good. According to the Mohists, one should act in a way that maximizes the greatest amount of overall, material good for the state, with the good described in terms of the wealth, order, and population of the state.⁶ Together with their call for impartial caring, Mohist consequentialism offered an appealing and powerful alternative to Kongzi’s traditional

vision. With their superior rhetorical abilities, the Mohists proved to be formidable opponents to later Confucians and seemed to have enjoyed considerable success.⁷ And they were not alone.

Yang Zhu and his followers offered another, appealing alternative.⁸ According to Yang Zhu, both the Mohists and Confucians were wrong. He seems to have believed that the Mohists had too impoverished a picture of what human beings were like; nobody, or at least very few people, could live as they suggested. More important, no one would choose to live as Mozi urged, if adequately apprised of proper alternatives and afforded the opportunity to pursue them. According to Yang Zhu, the Mohist life was contrary to human nature, and therefore, it could not be sustained. The Confucians, too, were wrong. They had a more robust picture of human nature, but it was the wrong picture. They over-embellished and thereby distorted the natural simplicity of our nature by following a set of traditional ritual practices. Rather than completing human nature, these practices twisted and deformed it. Kongzi and his followers offered no explicit arguments for why one should follow tradition, only the promise that by doing so everything would work out for the best. In response, Yang Zhu argued that the proper goal of human life was to be as Heaven made us: to be *natural*. The true character of human nature was to provide and care for oneself and to live out one's years. Yang Zhu was a special kind of egoist, one who didn't see social participation as, in any significant degree, integral to personal satisfaction or human flourishing.⁹

At this point in history, Mengzi (391-308 B.C.E.) emerged to take up the defense of the Confucian cause.¹⁰ His particular statement of the Confucian vision took form, to a significant extent, as a response to the Mohist and Yangist challenges. On several occasions, Mengzi expresses his alarm concerning how popular the ideas of Mozi and Yang Zhu had become, and in one revealing passage, he gives us some idea of what he thought of the followers of these two thinkers and their relationship to Confucianism.

Those who desert the Mohist School are sure to turn to Yang Zhu and those who desert the Yangist School are sure to turn to us. When they come to us, we simply accept them. Nowadays, those who debate the followers of Yang and Mo act as though they were chasing runaway pigs. Even after they get them back in the pen, they go and tie up their legs.¹¹

This passage makes at least two important points. The latter part is an admonition, perhaps directed at some of Mengzi's own disciples, concerning the error of castigating recent converts to the Confucian cause. Its point seems to be connected to the first part of the passage, where

Mengzi describes a natural progression of understanding and allegiance, leading from Mo to Yang and then to Kongzi. The thought here seems to be that people can and must find their own way to the truth. One cannot deny other people their autonomy without perhaps fatally undermining the course of their progress.

But why might Mengzi believe in the “natural” progression described in this passage and what is the nature of this course of development? Perhaps he believed that most of those who try to follow the Mohist way will find it asks too much of them. People in general just cannot be impartial about whom they care for to the degree the Mohists insist upon. Most find that they cannot ignore the deep and persistent urgings of their nature—as Mengzi understood it—and this will lead them to forget the state in favor of their kin, friends, and acquaintances.¹² People who try the Mohist way and find that it does not sustain them, will abandon this overly idealist and other-directed life and turn instead to their own more local concerns, and so it is “natural” that they will turn to Yang Zhu’s way. But Mengzi is confident that when they seek for satisfaction by following Yang Zhu, they will again be disappointed. For one cannot find true and complete satisfaction in life by aiming at it directly, seeking *only* for one’s own satisfaction and local concerns. Part of what we seek comes from living a life that is not only good for particular individuals but one that is good for humans in general. And since by nature we are social creatures, the good life for us must accommodate the social and political dimensions of life. But those who have turned away from Mozi and to Yang Zhu are looking in the right place, they are looking within themselves and not to some *exterior* doctrine, as do the Mohists. And so Mengzi believes that they will discover the truth of Confucianism; that, as human beings, they can find meaning and satisfaction in life only by becoming *moral people*. It turns out that fulfilling familial and social obligations not only is not in conflict with personal satisfaction, these obligations lie at the very center of the good life. With this realization, these people will join the Confucian fold.

Mengzi explicitly linked the task of self cultivation with the development of one’s Heavenly conferred nature; he maintained the structure of Kongzi’s original vision, but set it upon a new foundation, a subtle yet powerful theory about human nature.¹³ One can see Mengzi’s philosophical views as part of an emerging debate about the true character of human nature. Mengzi believed that, by nature, human beings are inclined toward the good, and that if we reflect upon and accord with this inclination, we will develop into full moral beings and fulfill the grand Confucian vision. Like many early Chinese thinkers, he believed that to *develop* oneself according to one’s true nature is to fulfill a design

inscribed by Heaven upon our human hearts. To follow the natural, then, is to obey Heaven, and to develop oneself is to serve Heaven.¹⁴ Given such assumptions, the central ethical question then becomes: What constitutes following one's nature?

Mengzi begins to answer this question by arguing that we are born with a nascent moral sense. To be precise, he believes we have four nascent moral senses: for benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and right and wrong.¹⁵ He refers to these nascent moral dispositions as *duan* 端 "sprouts," and his choice of metaphor is critical to what he seeks to convey.¹⁶ For like sprouts, our moral sense is a *visible and active*, not *hidden or latent*, part of the self.¹⁷ Mengzi has a variety of different arguments to establish the existence of the moral sprouts, but I will discuss only two: his arguments based on *give-away actions* and those based on *thought experiments*.¹⁸

The notion of a give-away action is used in the philosophical analysis of self-deception. People who are self-deceived must both in some sense know something is the case and yet hide this knowledge from themselves and deny that this is so. For example, a young man might deny that he loves a young woman and yet *in some deep sense* he knows that he loves her. Other people who observe his behavior know that he loves her—despite his repeated denials—because they see him engage in a variety of activities that can only be understood as being motivated by such love. For example, he *just happens* to keep a record of every occasion he has met her, he *just happens* to maintain lists of her preferences and close friends, he *just happens* to walk—far out of his way—to pass by her window as he returns from work each day and he regularly talks about getting a tattoo of her name inscribed within the borders of a burning heart. All these actions *give-away* his true feelings, and with any luck, his friends will help him realize his love for her by pointing these things out.

Mengzi relies upon such give-away actions in his moral teaching. He points out instances where a person unknowingly has acted in a moral way, where the only plausible explanation for so acting is that this individual was motivated by some innate altruistic desire. For example, in a conversation with King Xuan of Qi, Mengzi recounts an occasion when the king spared an ox that he happened to see as it was being led to slaughter.¹⁹ Taking pity on the ox, because of its frightened appearance and mournful cries, the king had it freed and replaced with a sheep. By questioning the king carefully, Mengzi leads him to see that the "heart" manifested in this act is the "sprout" of benevolence. The king spontaneously understood and manifested not merely an awareness of the ox's suffering but a concern for its well-being. His conversation with Mengzi moves the king to quote and comment on the *Odes*:

The king was pleased and said, "The *Odes* says, 'The heart belongs to another. But through reflection, I take its measure.' This describes you perfectly! For though I did the deed, when I turned to search within myself, I could not understand my own feelings. But when you described these events, it stirred my heart."²⁰

Mengzi also employs "thought-experiments" to argue for the existence of the moral sprouts. By this I mean he invokes hypothetical scenarios and then asks us to imagine what would occur were such conditions to obtain. Albert Einstein employed such thought-experiments to great effect in theoretical physics, asking us to imagine what would happen to time and space if one were on a spacecraft traveling at the speed of light. Unlike such an imaginative excursion—which is in principle impossible to actually experience—Mengzi's moral thought-experiments describe quite ordinary experiences that offer a compelling case for the existence of a nascent, innate moral sense.

For example, he asks us to imagine the case of a person who suddenly and without warning sees a child about to fall into a well.²¹ He asks, would not such a person immediately experience a feeling of alarm and concern for the child?²² And would this feeling not be motivated purely out of one's innate disposition to feel sympathetic concern for an innocent human being? A fascinating aspect to such moral thought experiments is that if Mengzi is right, all of us, in contemplating this hypothetical scenario and reflecting upon it, will imaginatively experience *our own* moral sprouts. That is to say, we too will feel a "stirring in our hearts" that testifies to our own standing disposition to feel sympathetic concern for our fellow human beings. Mengzi will have gotten us to take the first step in our own moral self cultivation.

At this point, Mengzi's claim is quite modest: at most he has shown that we have *some* moral sensitivity as part of our nature. This won't get us very far. One might admit that such a sense exists and still maintain that it is such a weak motivation for action that it rarely, if ever, determines or guides one's conduct. Even if we accept Mengzi's belief that one should follow one's nature, the mere existence of the sprouts won't lead us to become moral.

Mengzi develops his case by going on to argue that there is a *natural structure* to the self and each part of us has a *natural function* to fulfill.²³ Of critical importance is the role that our *xin* 心 "heart" plays. For the early Chinese the *xin* contained cognitive (i.e., rational) faculties, affective (i.e., emotional) faculties—including the four moral "sprouts"—as well as volitional abilities (something akin to but distinct from our common notion of will), so it is best thought of as the "heart

and mind.”²⁴ Mengzi argued that unlike our other parts, our *xin* is able to consider, weigh, and judge between competing courses of action. Because the *xin* and only the *xin* performs this function, it is the natural governor of the self. And since, in order to fulfill Heaven’s grand design for us and for the world, we must exercise each of our parts according to its individual natural function, we must think and reflect about the things we do. If we do this, we bring into play our innate moral sense.

Gongduzi said, “All are equally human. Why is it that some become great and others small?”

Mengzi replied, “Those who follow what is great within them become great; those who follow what is small become small.”

Gongduzi then said, “All are equally human. Why is it that some follow what is great and others follow what is small?”

Mengzi replied, “It is not the function of the ear or the eye to reflect, and so they can become obsessed with things. Being unreflective, when they come in contact with other things, they are led astray. The function of the mind is to reflect. When it reflects, it gets things right, if it does not reflect, it cannot get things right. These are what Heaven has given us. If one takes one’s stand in the great that is within, the small cannot take it away. This is what makes one great.”²⁵

Mengzi needs only one further claim to make a plausible case and this concerns the joy of moral action. He argues that if we monitor and assess our reactions to the things we think and do by an internal act of *si* “reflection” or “concentration,” we will be guided toward good actions and away from bad.²⁶ The contemplation of good acts produces a special feeling of joy in us which in turn reinforces the moral sense and enables us, through a process of *extension*,²⁷ to do more and more difficult actions.²⁸ In Mengzi’s own terms, such joy nourishes the moral sprouts; it provides them with a special kind of *qi* 氣 “energy.” Mengzi called this special energy the *haoran zhi qi* 浩然之氣 “flood-like energy”;²⁹ it is the energy of moral courage, the motivation or power that enables one to perform difficult moral tasks. Like the energy of any living thing, the moral sprouts thrive when properly nourished, and without such nourishment, they wither away.³⁰

Mengzi uses a variety of agricultural metaphors to express his view of how the moral sprouts are to be cultivated. These metaphors reveal significant aspects of his ethical theory and, in particular, his views on moral self cultivation.³¹ Let us focus upon two aspects of these agricultural metaphors: first, the gradual nature of this process, and second, the need for it to occur within a certain kind of environment.

Mengzi warns us not to rush the process of moral self cultivation in

the parable of the Farmer of Song. The parable, in part, goes like this:

There was a man of Song who pulled at his shoots of grain, because he was anxious for them to grow. After pulling on the shoots, he went home, not realizing what he had done. He said to his family, "I am worn out today; I have been helping the grain to grow." His son rushed out of the house to look at their plants and found that they all had withered.³²

Mengzi goes on to say that one "must neither neglect one's shoots nor force them to grow." The former course of action will result in a lack of progress, but the latter will do positive harm. What then is one supposed to do? It seems that while the task of moral self cultivation requires one to be attentive to and actively involved in the process, one must not rush the course of one's moral development and attempt to do things that one is not quite ready to do. Mengzi has in mind here the person who wants to be a better person but doesn't want to face the fact that moral development is a long and difficult process that depends more on a steady accumulation of simple acts than a grand display of goodness. If, in the initial stages of moral development, one forsakes the simple acts and attempts something of grand proportion, even if one succeeds in doing the grand deed, the likelihood is that one will on some level *regret* doing it.³³ This can cause one to come to resent the entire process of moral self cultivation and lead one, mistakenly, to conclude that one just isn't up to the task. Unless one has a lively and wholehearted involvement in the moral acts one performs, unless one can, on some level, *feel* that one should act in this way, they will not only fail to help, they may actually hinder one's effort.³⁴ Like love, moral improvement "don't come easy." It requires the cultivation of knowledge, sensitivities, and dispositions that are won only through patient and prolonged application. The desire to be a good person can itself pose an impediment to moral improvement, if it encourages one to work beyond one's moral means. Improper moral cultivation causes one's moral sprouts to wither rather than flourish.

The final point concerns Mengzi's claim that for most people, the process of moral self cultivation must take place within a certain kind of environment. Though there are rare moral heroes who are able to successfully pursue the task of moral self cultivation even in the harshest of environments,³⁵ most of us need certain minimal conditions if we are to have a reasonable chance of success.

Mengzi said, "In years of plenty, many young people are reliable, but in years of want many cannot control themselves. It is not because of their Heavenly conferred endowments that such

differences exist. It is because of what their hearts become mired in."³⁶

An environment devoid of basic necessities and comforts, good examples, and proper encouragement will usually prove impossible to overcome. Under such unhealthy conditions, most people will fail to develop their natural moral sensibilities. Their moral sprouts will become stunted and, overgrown with less noble tendencies, they may even become difficult to discern.

Even the best of moral teachers may be unable to help someone first embarking on the task of self cultivation overcome a harsh environment. Mengzi describes his own failure to help King Xuan of Qi:

Do not be puzzled by the king's lack of wisdom. Even the most easily grown thing in all the world will not grow if it is given only one day of warmth for every ten days of cold. I see the king only rarely and when I withdraw, those whose effect upon him is like the cold arrive at his side. Though I draw forth some *meng* 萌 "sprouts" what good does it do?³⁷

The process of development which Mengzi describes, at least for most people, must take place within the context of a certain kind of human society. The moral sprouts we have are innate, but they require both conscious and concerted effort and a proper environment in order to develop as they should. Here we see the integral relationship between Confucian ethical philosophy and their political and social theory. Confucians believe that one cannot successfully pursue the ethical life outside of fulfilling certain familial and social obligations. One cannot develop a moral sense without knowing what it is to love and be loved within a human family,³⁸ and one cannot love and care for one's family without a deep and abiding concern for the society in which one lives.

One might think of Mengzi's claims about the innate good tendencies of human nature and their development into full moral dispositions using the analogy of human language. Our moral sprouts are innate, it is our nature to develop them, and this process requires a certain kind of environment. In the same way, human beings have an innate ability to speak human language, but this innate ability must be developed, and this requires a certain kind of benign environment.³⁹ Specifically, it requires caring family members and a community of fellow conversationalists. In both cases, too, a good deal of persistent individual effort must be applied if one is to realize fully the extraordinary nature of this innate inclination. In order to realize Heaven's design and become fully human, one must work to *develop* one's nature, and this development requires one to participate fully in familial and social life.

Notes

1. This state of affairs is accurately reflected in the title and substance of Benjamin I. Schwartz's revealing study of the period, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*. Other indispensable studies of this period include: A. C. Graham's *Disputers of the Tao* (LaSalle, IN: Open Court Press, 1989) and the more traditional, though less analytical, Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963) and Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Derk Bodde, tr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953).

2. For a study of Mozi's philosophy, see Y. P. Mei, *Mo-tse, the Neglected Rival of Confucius* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1934) and Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Mohist Philosophy" in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 6 (London: Routledge Press, 1998): 451-55. For a study of the religious dimensions of Mozi's thought, see Scott Lowe, *Mo Tzu's Religious Blueprint for a Chinese Utopia* (Lewiston, ME: Edwin Mellon Press, Ltd., 1992). For a remarkable study of later Mohist thought, see A. C. Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1978).

3. For a fascinating essay which argues for the reconciliation of these opposing perspectives, see David B. Wong, "Universalism versus Love with Distinctions: An Ancient Debate Revived," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 16:3-4 (September-December, 1989): 251-72.

4. Mozi appears to have been strongly voluntaristic, though some of his later followers, e.g., Yi Zhi, seem to have softened his voluntarism. See David S. Nivison, "Two Roots or One?" *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 53.6 (August, 1980): 739-61. For an interesting alternative reading of Yi Zhi's position, see Kwong-loi Shun, "Mencius' Criticism of Mohism: An Analysis of *Meng Tzu* 3A:5," *Philosophy East and West*, 41.2 (April, 1991): 203-14.

5. The most thorough study of these aspects of later Mohist thought is Graham, *Later Mohist Logic*. Also of great interest is Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956): 168-84.

6. This is what Mozi describes as the task of "the benevolent man planning for the welfare of the world." See Burton Watson, tr., *Mo Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963): 65. See also the "Honoring the Worthy" chapter, p. 18. Mozi does seem to recognize honor as a psychological good, but it is not a central concern in his ethical theory. See Watson, pp. 18-33.

7. The Mohist school died out toward the end of the Warring States period perhaps because they were an organized, paramilitary group. Such a group would pose a considerable threat to the increasingly unified empire that eventually culminated in the Qin dynasty.

8. The most complete and incisive study of Yang Zhu and his thought is to be found in Graham, *Disputers*, pp. 53-64. Robert Eno questions Graham's views. For a summation of his objections, see his *The Confucian Creation of Heaven* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990): 257-8, n. 41.

9. He was not, as he is often depicted, a hedonist. A life of hedonistic indulgence would surely prove injurious to "living out one's years," which was one of Yang Zhu's central goals. As Graham points out, it is also inaccurate and unfair to describe Yang Zhu (as Mengzi does) as fundamentally *selfish*. The good life for Yang Zhu included care of kin and friends. Moreover, he believed that each person tending to these more local, personal concerns, yielded the best overall results for everyone.

10. The dates for Mengzi's life are from David S. Nivison, "Meng Tzu," Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 9 (New York: MacMillan Book Company, 1987): 373-6.

11. *Mengzi*, 7B26. See also 3B9 and 7A26, etc.

12. A similar objection to Mohism is made in chapter 33 of the *Zhuangzi*. See Burton Watson, tr., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968). 364-7.

13. The two most important studies of Mengzi's theory of human nature are A. C. Graham, "The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature," reprinted in his *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990): 7-66, and D. C. Lau, "Theories of Human Nature in Mengzi and Xunzi" reprinted in T. C. Kline, and Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*. Several important essays on Mengzi's philosophy can be found in David S. Nivison, *The Ways of Confucianism* (Chicago: Open Court Press, 1996). Advanced students will want to study Kwong-loi Shun's important work, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997) which offers an impressive survey and discussion of the secondary literature on many passages and problems in the text. My own understanding of Mengzi's theory of human nature and how it relates to his ethical teachings can be found in my *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mencius and Wang Yang-ming*.

14. See *Mengzi* 7A1. It is important to note that for Mengzi this meant attending to and according with certain spontaneous tendencies, exercising one's natural capacities for inquiry, reflection, and action and taking one's place in a grand cosmological scheme. It was *not* merely obeying the commands or according with the will of some deity or deities.

15. *Mengzi* 2A6 and 6A6. Another way of understanding Mengzi is to see him as holding that there is one moral sense that gets manifested in four different basic modes. Liu Xiusheng makes a very good case for something like this latter view, arguing that a general sense of benevolence or sympathetic concern is fundamental to the other "sprouts." This is not only philosophically interesting—making Mengzi's view similar in important

ways to thinkers like Hume—but also textually appealing, for Mengzi makes an explicit argument only for the heart of benevolence. See Liu Xiusheng, *The Place of Humanity in Ethics: Combined Insights from Hume and Mencius*, PhD Dissertation, Department of Philosophy, The University of Texas at Austin (December, 1999). For the notion of “sympathetic concern,” see Stephen Darwall, “Empathy, Sympathy, Care,” *Philosophical Studies*, 89 (1998): 261-82.

16. Mengzi uses the word *duan* repeatedly in 2A6, where he presents the clearest statement of this aspect of his view of human nature. He also uses other characters, for example *meng* 萌 “sprouts” and *nie* 孽 “buds” in order to make related points about the growth and fragility of the moral sense in 6A8 and 6A9. In 2A2, we find the story of the Farmer of Song who pulls on his *miao* 苗 “spouts of grain” in a misguided effort to help them grow.

Translating *duan* as “sprout” reveals an extensive and complex metaphor that reappears throughout the text in different forms; for Mengzi, agriculture is a paradigm for self cultivation. D. C. Lau clearly understood that *duan* meant “sprout.” See p. 214, n. #19 in the reprint of his early seminal work, “Mengzi and Xunzi on Human Nature.” In her recent book, Sarah Allan discusses this issue with insight. See her *The Way of Water and Sprouts of Virtue* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997): 113-4.

17. In order for Mengzi’s program of self cultivation to work, it must be the case that people *already* possess some active and visible moral capacity that they can attend to and develop. This feature of his view of human nature is critical for the two types of arguments he provides for the existence of the moral sprouts which we will examine here.

18. For a more complete discussion see my *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mencius and Wang Yang-ming*, pp. 73-9.

19. *Mengzi* 1A7.

20. *Mengzi* 1A7.

21. *Mengzi* 2A6.

22. Mengzi is not concerned here with the question of what such a person would *actually do* so much as what she would perceive and *experience*. To understand this example as saying that anyone in such a situation would rush over and *try to save* the child goes considerably beyond what the text describes; it only says a person in such a scenario will experience a “feeling of alarm and concern.”

23. He argues for the first claim in *Mengzi* 6A14 and the second in 6A15. Also, in 7A1, we see that fully developing one’s *xin* is the way to understand one’s nature, which in turn is the way to understand Heaven.

24. See the entry for *hsin* (i.e., *xin*) by David S. Nivison in Mircea Eliade, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 6, pp. 477-8. Mengzi does not do an adequate job of sorting out the various aspects of the *xin* and is unclear about

important aspects of his moral psychology, e.g., the extent to which the mind can be affected by or contains bad inclinations as well as good. His view of volition is roughly that we possess the ability to steer and focus our attention on different parts of the heart and mind, thereby engaging (or disengaging) different emotional and intentional resources within the self.

25. *Mengzi* 6A15.

26. As I mentioned earlier (see pp. 2-3) in my discussion of Kongzi's method of self cultivation, Mengzi's sense of the character *si* marks a new development in its use as a term of art in moral psychology.

27. The western philosophical study of Mengzi's notion of moral extension began with David S. Nivison's seminal article, "Mencius and Motivation," in Henry Rosemont, Jr., ed., *Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Thematic Issue* 5 47.3 (September, 1980): 417-32. His position at that time is developed by Kwong-loi Shun in "Moral Reasons in Confucian Ethics," *The Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 16 (1989): 317-43. Shun's view is discussed and criticized by Bryan W. Van Norden's subsequent essay, "Kwong-loi Shun on Moral Reasons in Mencius," *The Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 18 (1991): 353-70. The discussion continues in David B. Wong, "Is There a Distinction between Reason and Emotion in Mencius?" *Philosophy East and West*, 41.1 (January, 1991): 31-44 and Craig K. Ihara, "David Wong on Emotions in Mencius" *Philosophy East and West* 41.1 (January, 1991): 45-53. More recently, Nivison returned to this issue in a significantly revised and expanded article, "Motivation and Moral Action in Mencius" in *The Ways of Confucianism*, pp. 91-119. My analysis can be found in "Chinese Self Cultivation and Mencian Extension," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (Forthcoming).

28. See *Mengzi* 4A27. Contemplation of proposed courses of actions or the actions of others can enable us to perform more and more difficult moral acts by helping us to attain proper understanding and sensitivity. But Mengzi appears to believe that the motivation to perform more challenging moral actions comes only or at least primarily through reflection on moral actions that we actually have done.

29. See *Mengzi* 2A2 for a fascinating discussion of varieties of courage and the cultivation of the flood-like *qi*. For discussions of this topic in Mengzi's thought, see Lee H. Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990) and Bryan W. Van Norden, "Mencius on Courage" in Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, and Howard K. Wettstein, eds., *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 21 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997): 237-56. The most complete treatment of this topic can be found in Jiang Xinyan, *Courage, Passion and Virtue*, PhD Dissertation, Department of Philosophy, University of Cincinnati (1994).

30. Consider the following lines from 6A8, "And so all things will flourish if only they receive their proper nourishment and all will perish if

they do not.” Here we see yet another example of agriculture as the paradigm for self cultivation. The idea is picked up and further developed in 6A9.

31. For example, see *Mengzi* 2A2, 2A6, 6A7, 6A8, 6A9, 6A19, etc.

32. *Mengzi* 2A2.

33. Consider *Mengzi* 7B11, “One who is fond of a good name may relinquish a state of a thousand chariots, but if one is not *really* this kind of person, giving away a cup of rice or a bowl of soup will show in one’s face.”

34. One might well be concerned that this view of things could lead one to continually put off difficult moral acts for another day. But, first, Mengzi believed that everyone had plenty of opportunities to perform helpful moral acts and therefore would *grow into* more difficult challenges, and, second, he does have his voluntarist moments in which he simply counsels procrastinating individuals to *just do it!* See for example, *Mengzi* 3B8. Mengzi’s insistence that one be properly committed to the moral act does not mean that such individuals never experience the difficulty that often is involved in doing the right thing. They may often feel conflicting emotions. What Mengzi is saying is that they *must* feel the moral motivation to act in order for such actions to help in their moral development.

35. The most dramatic example of this is perhaps the sage emperor Shun, who overcame an abusive family situation to become the epitome of filial virtue. His good conduct eventually converted his father (see *Mengzi* 4A28, cf. 7A16). One also sees it in the person of Yi Yin and Mengzi’s teaching that Heaven chooses certain individuals to “awaken first” (see *Mengzi* 5A7). In 6B15, he recalls the difficulties overcome by a number of sages and claims that Heaven places such challenges in the path of those it has chosen in order to steel them for the task ahead. And while Mengzi claims that all people are the same in kind as these sages, he also insists that *they* had a natural talent for morality. Mengzi says, “Yao and Shun had it as their nature. Tang and Wu embodied it. The five lord protectors borrowed from it. . . .” *Mengzi* 7A30, cf. 7B33. Since our moral sense is a natural capacity, Mengzi assumed that some people would prove to be naturally “gifted” in these ways.

36. *Mengzi* 6A7.

37. *Mengzi* 6A9

38. Cf. *Mengzi* 7A15

39. Cf. *Mengzi* 3B6. In a recent and fascinating work, Steven Pinker describes human beings as possessing a “language instinct.” See Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct* reprint (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995). While this dramatic way of stating things is helpful in emphasizing the innate tendency we possess to acquire and use language, it can also mislead. For unlike other instincts, our ability to acquire and use language requires an inherited culture and other properly disposed—i.e., helpful and encouraging—language users. Feral children do not spontaneously become proficient language users, and if a child’s ability to acquire language is not

developed early in life, it can never become proficient. If the same holds true for moral development, this would provide good warrants for focusing much more attention on early development, the vast majority of which occurs within the family.