

3 Human Nature and Cultivation in Confucian Philosophy: Mencius and Xunzi

Confucius' vision for rectifying society was idealistic: good government begins with the moral self-cultivation of able leaders. At times, the *Analects* acknowledges that the chances of such rectification were low (*Analects* 7:26; 9:13). Nevertheless, its theme of self-cultivation (*xiushen*) has had far-reaching effects in Chinese society and culture. The belief that education begets moral wisdom was articulated in the Chinese Civil Service Examination system for recruiting officials. The system, which had its beginnings during the Sui dynasty (581–618) and which thrived during the Qing (1644–1911), employed men who performed well in examinations based largely on Confucian texts. It was believed that scholars of the classical texts would also be ethically adept practitioners of good government (Elman 2009).

The Confucians were optimistic, yet to some extent pragmatic, in their assessment of human moral capacities and how these could be shaped to produce more fruitful outcomes for society. Self-cultivation played a central role in the Confucian hope for a better, more ethically focused society. Both Mencius (c. 385 BCE–c. 312 BCE) and Xunzi (c. 310 BCE–c. 219 BCE) reflected on the resources available to humanity for its cultivation. They discussed the human capacity to be moral and the fabric or infrastructure of society that supported its development. They drew different conclusions, however. Mencius believed that humans had a natural tendency to feel compassion even though some acted maliciously and selfishly; these latter behaviours resulted from a negligence to nurture the original compassionate heart-mind (*xin*). Xunzi held that individuals were not naturally predisposed to ethical conduct; it was only through the establishment of standards for human conduct, initiated by the ruler, that these problems could be addressed. In spite of their differences, both viewed morally-inspired government as the key to their respective approaches to establish a humane society. Their debates on human nature and its cultivation engaged with a range of views held by

other thinkers. These discussions and ensuing tensions shaped conceptions of morality, government and society in China for years to come.

Confucian philosophy holds a unique conception of the relational self, one that is shaped by its relationships and situated within a particular human community, within which it has its spheres of influence. It attends to the contexts within which learning is situated; in the texts associated with the Confucian thinkers Mencius and Xunzi, the nature of social institutions and the practices and ideals promulgated through these institutions were of vital importance. The following Confucian themes that have been shaped by the debate between the *Mencius* and the *Xunzi* are highlighted in current debates in comparative philosophy: character development and issues in moral psychology, centrality of relationships in moral life, the progressive nature of moral development (focusing on different elements of moral reasoning that are cultivated at different stages in a person's moral life) and the integrated nature of personal development and socio-political progress. This chapter explores key themes in the two texts in light of a range of views expressed in contemporaneous texts that were excavated only in the last fifty years, followed by discussion of some insights arising from their disagreements.

Mencius: Nurturing Goodness

The figure Mencius comes across as an estimable Confucian, said to have been taught by Confucius' grandson, Zisi (c. 483 BCE–c. 402 BCE), famous for his upbringing because of his mother's (Mengmu) exemplary moral teaching¹ and author of an eponymous text that frequently refers to the ideas of Confucius.² Although the issue of authorship and details of Mencius' life are disputed, the text nevertheless holds a central place in Confucian philosophy for its optimistically humanistic views of human goodness and

¹ On Zisi, refer to Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book*, 1963a: 49. The Mengmu story is told by Liu Xiang (first century BCE) in the *Lienü Zhuan*. Refer to Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 2014: 18–20, and Wang 2006: 96–7. For an account of the Confucian followers and their views, refer to Lo 2014.

² The *Books of Mencius* is one of four sets of books in the Confucian canon, the *Four Books* (*Si Shu*). Collated by the Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi (1130–1200), these four books, the *Great Learning* (*Daxue*), the *Analects* (*Lunyu*), the *Books of Mencius* and the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*) were part of the core curriculum of the civil service examinations.

compassionate government (*ren zheng*). A short, cryptic phrase captures its philosophy of human goodness: “human nature is good” (*xing shan*) (*Mencius* 6A:6). This statement of Mencius’ position arises in a conversation with one of his disciples, Gongduzi, where three competing views are laid out:

Gongduzi said, “Gaozi said, ‘There is neither good nor bad in human nature,’ but others say, ‘Human nature can become good or it can become bad, and that is why with the rise of King Wan and King Wu, the people were given to goodness, while with the rise of King Yu and King Li, they were given to cruelty.’ Then there are others who say, ‘There are those who are good by nature, and there are those who are bad by nature. For this reason, Xiang could have Yao as Prince, and Shun could have the Blind Man (Gu Sou) as father, and Qi, Viscount of Wei and Prince Bi Gan could have Zhou as nephew as well as sovereign.’ Now you say human nature is good. Does this mean that all the others are mistaken?” (*Mencius* 6A:6; trans. Lau, *Mencius*, 1979b: 247)

In the context of this conversation and others in the *Mencius*, there is a fundamental concern about how goodness is *natural* to human beings. Translators have sometimes understood this to mean “intrinsic,” “inherent” or “inborn,” suggesting that goodness is a tendency or disposition humans are born with. However, in the discussion here, we use the term “natural” to capture the nonspecific and varied uses of the term in the *Mencius*. On this interpretation, for Mencius to say “human nature is good” is to imply that goodness comes naturally to humanity because of the kind of being humans are and, possibly, that this is *distinctively* human. This interpretation avoids essentialism and is better able to accommodate a developmental path as well as the fact that individuals may not be consistently good. What, then, is meant by “human nature” (*xing*) and “goodness” (*shan*)? Closer examination of the three positions will help us better understand Mencius’ views as well as their place in Confucian intellectual history.³ The competing conceptions of human nature set out in this conversation are as follows:

- Morality is not a naturally given aspect of human nature. (“There is neither good nor bad in human nature.”)
- Human nature is not naturally inclined towards goodness. (“Human nature can become good or it can become bad”).

³ Refer to A. C. Graham’s careful description of the three positions (1967: 13–5).

- Not all humans are naturally inclined towards goodness. (“There are those who are good by nature, and there are those who are bad by nature.”)

We examine each view in turn, taking the opportunity to draw out some underlying philosophical commitments and their implications.

<i>Textual matters</i>	The debates are even more interesting in light of the unearthed Guodian bamboo manuscripts, believed to have been composed around the period of the <i>Mencius</i> and the <i>Xunzi</i> . These manuscripts were unearthed in 1993 from a tomb in Guodian, in Hubei Province. The manuscripts, dated to around 300 BCE, include versions of the <i>Laozi</i> (Allan and Williams 1998) as well as previously unknown Confucian texts (Cook, <i>Bamboo Texts</i> , 2012). It has been suggested that the Confucian texts were associated with the lineage of Confucius’ grandson, Zisi ⁴ – reputed to have been Mencius’ teacher – although discussions on human nature in the Guodian texts reveal some alliances with and some opposition to Mencius’ views.
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Morality Is Not a Naturally Given Aspect of Human Nature

Mencius’ disagreements with Gaozi⁵ (c. 420–350 BCE) may be grouped into two broad arguments. First, there is the question, Is goodness a “given” part of human nature? The term “given” is used here not to suggest there is a “giver” (as, for instance, in a divine being who has created or imparted this nature). “Given” here expresses the fact that there is an existing state of play – what we can take “as a given.” It may also include the sense of given

⁴ Goldin challenges this view (Goldin 2000: 115; see note 8). The discussion in this chapter will demonstrate that the views in some of the Guodian texts are more closely aligned with Xunzi’s views.

⁵ Little is known of Gaozi’s background and associations. Kwong-Loi Shun discusses a number of theses regarding his philosophical affiliations (1997: pp. 123ff.). Shun presents a detailed analysis of Mencius’ discussions with Gaozi (Ibid.: 87–94).

Graham suggests that a more accurate reading of Gaozi’s position (as we know only of Gaozi’s views on human nature via the description of his opponent, Mencius) may be gleaned from the “Jie” chapter of the *Guanzi*, a syncretic, Legalist compilation of positions from the late Warring States period through to the early Han (Graham 1967: 15–18). For the “Jie” chapter, refer to Rickett, *Guanzi*, 2001: 378–88).

used predicatively, to indicate that humans are inclined to goodness. The conversation between Mencius and Gongduzi draws two analogies (*Mencius* 6A:1–2). In the first, Gaozi's position is presented by Mencius as follows: cups and bowls may be fashioned from willow though cups and bowls are not naturally given in the willow's existence. Analogously, benevolence (*ren*) and moral rightness (*yi*)⁶ are what human beings are *shaped into* and are not inherent in human nature. Here, although Gaozi disagrees with Mencius about the *source* of goodness, he nevertheless agrees that benevolence and rightness are constitutive of human goodness. Mencius dismisses this analogy and the discussion moves on to a second analogy, attributed to Gaozi: human nature is like flowing water, which can be channelled east or west. While Mencius agrees with Gaozi on this point, he extends the analogy, showing that water has a *tendency* to flow downwards.⁷ Hence, even though human actions and decisions may be influenced by conditions external to the self, they are *naturally inclined* towards goodness, and moral cultivation consists in developing these incipient tendencies. This is a key tenet in Mencius' conception of humanity.

The second question focuses specifically on rightness and whether it is naturally given in human nature (*Mencius* 6A:4). Gaozi's position states that benevolence is internal (*nei*), evidenced in love for one's brother arising from within oneself. However, rightness is external (*wai*), evidenced by respect for an old person *by virtue of* his age and not arising from within oneself. The word "rightness" is most fitting for Gaozi's view of *yi*. *Yi* has a variety of meanings in the *Analects*, and in the *Mencius* and the *Xunzi*, we see variations in its uses too. Hence the discussion here does not attempt to provide a unifying translation of the term, but instead focuses on the variety of its

⁶ *Yi* is often translated as "righteousness" or "duty." Here, I use the word "rightness" for *yi*, which pertains to a sense of doing the right thing. We see in the conversation between Mencius and Gaozi, for example, that *yi* applies to respect for an older person. "Duty" helps to capture the deontological dimension of *yi* but "rightness" alludes to the notion of right in the clarification by W. D. Ross (2002), which also includes a sense of fit and appropriateness.

⁷ Shun suggests that Mencius might have misinterpreted Gaozi's position: whereas Gaozi intends the willow and the water, respectively, to be analogous to *xing*, Mencius interprets that the analogy holds between the willow and water, on the one hand, and human beings, on the other. This mismatch in their conversation has significant impact on how we understand their respective positions (1997: 87–91).

meanings in the hands of different thinkers. In Gaozi's view, expressed in the *Mencius*, respect for an old person is required not because of some greater good, but simply because it is the right thing to do. That only benevolence, and not rightness, is naturally given complicates the views of human nature proposed around that time. This view is also expressed in a Guodian manuscript, *Yucong* 1, where it is stated: "Benevolence is born from humankind; rightness is born from the Way. One is born from within; the other is born from without" (strips 22–3; adapted from the translation by Cook, *Bamboo Texts*, 2012: 825). This passage in *Yucong* 1 provides some independent evidence (apart from the *Mencius*) for the view associated with Gaozi.⁸ These dissonant views help to diversify the lines of argument in the Confucian debates on human nature, often cast only in terms of the tensions between Mencius and Xunzi.

In contrast to the view that only *ren* is given as part of the human condition, the *Mencius* holds that rightness is also "internal," that is, naturally given in human nature.⁹ The Guodian text *Cheng Zhi* also expresses this view. The *Mencius* spells out clearly that both *ren* and *yi* are possessed by all humans *prior to learning*: affection for parents is a manifestation of naturally given benevolence and respect for elders is a manifestation of *yi* (*Mencius* 7A:15). Given that Mencius holds that *yi* is internal to humanity, the term "righteousness" would more aptly capture his idea of an "inner" moral sense that functions like conscience does. This suggests that Gaozi and Mencius may have had different conceptions of *yi*. The understanding of Mencius' view of human nature turns in part on how we understand the place of *yi* in his philosophy. In contemporary discussions, *yi* in the *Mencius* has been interpreted in a number of ways, including as a person's *motivation* to do the right thing, a person's dispositions or a person's dispositions closely intertwined with (moral) knowledge, whereby knowledge of *yi* arises from the activity of the heart-mind (Shun 1997: 94–112).

⁸ It might suggest that some parts of the *Guodian* manuscripts were written by those associated with Gaozi or who were sympathetic to his views (refer to Goldin 2000: 139).

⁹ Kim-Chong Chong challenges the widely held view that this is the key difference between Mencius and Gaozi on *nei* and *wai*. Chong argues that Mencius did not succeed in refuting Gaozi, for Mencius' discussion on internality was focused on the human potential for developing the (positive) possibilities of relationships. By contrast, Gaozi sees this argument as a "sociocultural construct" (Chong 2002: 120).

We may express the disagreement between Mencius and Gaozi in terms of the moral resources available to humanity and how (and where) the resources may be found. In *Mencius* 2A:2, Mencius says of Gaozi's views:

Gaozi said "What you do not get from doctrines do not seek for in your heart. What you do not get from your heart, do not seek for in the *qi*."

To which Mencius replied:

"What you do not get from your heart, do not seek for in the *qi*," is acceptable. "What you do not get from doctrines, do not seek for in your heart," is unacceptable. (*Mencius* 2A:2; trans. Van Norden, *Mengzi*, 2008: 37)

There are two related assertions in Gaozi's statement concerning sources of moral guidance. The first claims that if guidance cannot be found in doctrines, it likewise cannot be found "within" human nature (or within any of its "given" capacities). The second states that if guidance is not found in the heart-mind, it will not be found in *qi* (vitality, energies) either. Mencius disagrees with the first claim. For Mencius, guidance *can* be found in the original, naturally given heart-mind. However, he agrees with Gaozi's second assertion because he holds that the heart-mind should nurture and command *qi*.¹⁰ Therefore, if guidance is not found in the heart-mind, there is no point trying to locate it in *qi*.

Two points are highlighted in this disagreement. First, Gaozi (is presented as a thinker who) endorses learning from doctrines rather than from nurturing the heart-mind. Second, Gaozi believes that nothing in the naturally given human constitution can provide moral guidance. Mencius deems both Gaozi's theses unacceptable.¹¹ One way to think about Mencius' emphasis on the "inner" is to say that the heart-mind has "an ethical direction, and this allows one to obtain ethical guidance through self-reflection" (Shun 1997: 212). This view makes a tight connection between naturally given goodness

¹⁰ Alan Chan offers a fine account of *qi* in different texts of a contemporaneous period. *Qi* in the *Mencius* includes both mental and physical well-being. One's words and eyes reflect one's *qi* and a person's environment can shape his or her *qi*. See Chan 2002: 50–5. The place of *qi* in Mencius' philosophy and the nuances of different interpretations of this view are meticulously spelt out in Chan 2002.

¹¹ Goldin suggests that, given that the *Guodian* texts express views similar to those of Gaozi's, it may be Mencius' views, rather than Gaozi's, that were unorthodox (2000: 139–43).

and the capacity for reflection. Another is to conceive of the “inner” as “innate disposition,” an interpretation that aligns with a virtues-based understanding of Mencius’ philosophy (Van Norden 2014). In setting out Gaozi’s views, the *Mencius* refines and reiterates its position that “human nature is (originally) good.” The distinction between the two views underscores the point in the text that some moral resources are naturally given in humanity. From this perspective, the debate transcends mere quibbles about “original” human nature to a more meaningful “enquiry into ethical resources” (Heng 2002: 158) and where to find them.

Another conversation about the place of doctrine in guiding human conduct occurs between Mencius and the Mohist Yi Zhi (*Mencius* 3A:5). The passage begins with Mencius’ criticism of Yi Zhi’s inconsistency: in spite of the Mohist teaching to be thrifty in funerals, Yi Zhi spared no expense at his parent’s funeral. In his own defence, Yi Zhi says,

According to the Way of the Ru, the ancients treated the people “like caring for a baby” . . . I take it to mean that love is without differentiations, but it is bestowed beginning with one’s parents. (*Mencius* 3A:5; trans. Van Norden, *Mengzi*, 2008: 74)

Yi Zhi – who may or may not have been an authentic representative of Mohist teaching¹² – emphasises Mohist love without distinctions (*ai wu cha deng*). He maintains that he *can* consistently uphold both tenets, going so far as to quote Confucian belief. He takes a circuitous route, identifying (Confucian) love for one’s parents (*qin*) as a starting point, which develops into Mohist love without differentiation. Mencius’ critical response follows:

Does Yi Zhi truly hold that one’s affection for one’s own nephew is like one’s affection for a neighbor’s baby? . . . Heaven, in giving birth to things, causes them to have one source, but Yi Zhi gives them two sources. (*Ibid.*)

It is clear that Mencius upholds the incompatibility between the two types of affective concern, one for a close family member and the other for a generalised other. What are the two sources (*ben*) Mencius refers to in his rebuttal? Mencius’ notion of source (or ground) is not particularly clear in the text, and there is a variety of proposals on how it may be conceived (see Shun 1997:

¹² Refer to Radice’s discussion of this issue (2011, esp. at p. 148).

128–30). A plausible interpretation of Yi Zhi’s two sources is to see them as two methods of moral cultivation, the first being one’s natural affection for one’s parents (shared by Yi Zhi and Mencius) and the second being adherence to a doctrine, that of treating everyone impartially, which only Yi Zhi upholds (Nivison 1980).¹³ According to this account, Mencius’ belief is that natural affection for parents, arising from the human heart-mind, is sufficient for a person’s moral cultivation. There is no need for (Mohist) doctrine. Yi Zhi’s rationale proceeds in two ways, by committing to the doctrine, and by drawing on the naturally given resources of the heart-mind to realise love without distinctions (Shun 1997: 132–5). This debate helps to cast light on Mencius’ belief that goodness is naturally given in human nature: it is universally available to all humanity, and it is sufficient. All it requires is cultivation, and nothing more (certainly not doctrine), for that original goodness to come to fruition. In the following section, we move on to the (second) question of how, in Mencius’ view, these naturally given resources might be nurtured.

Human Nature Is Not Naturally Inclined towards Goodness

In contrast to Mencius’ belief, this view expresses ambivalence about what is naturally given to humans (Chen 2002). A different explanation is provided for acts of altruism or selfishness: conditions in the external environment alone will explain why some people are good and others not. The *Mencius* needs to address this view because it rejects such ambivalence. For Mencius, not only is human nature naturally inclined towards goodness, these seeds of goodness must be nurtured. Goodness is not simply an accidental outcome of good or bad times or of good or poor leaders. To this end, the text identifies a deeper ground – heaven (*tian*) – as the source of humanity’s natural goodness. *Tian* is evoked to provide support for Mencius’ claim; it seems that the primary purpose here was not to explore cosmic or spiritual ideals but to identify heaven as a source of human capacities and potential. This move was not unusual during that period.

¹³ Nivison suggests that Mencius’ “one root” is the heart, which is the seat of both “what we really want to do [motivation]” and “what we ought to do and can rightly recognize we ought to do [recognised obligation]” (1980: 742).

For example, the *Zhongyong* (*Doctrine of the Mean*), another Confucian text,¹⁴ takes a similar stance on *tian* (see Tu 1976).

For Mencius, heaven provides the rationale for nurturing a person's heart-mind: the person who preserves and nurtures the naturally good heart-mind is engaged with heaven in working towards stable socio-political order. Mencius' philosophy places the seat of human goodness in the heart-mind. Here, a question arises concerning the way he brings together the subject of human existence (a metaphysical issue) and the nature of human conduct (an ethical issue). The tension between the "factual and normative" was already present in the intellectual context then (Graham 1967: 44). According to Angus Graham, Mencius' heaven-endowed *xin* brings these two dimensions of *tian* together: "the Way, without ceasing to be normative, becomes the single course along which a thing can in fact complete its development, as a tree can grow only if watered by the rain and dew; within the sphere of Heaven there is no longer a contradiction between what is and what ought to be" (*ibid.*).

In the *Mencius*, there is considerable co-referencing between the terms *xin* (heart-mind) and *xing* (human nature). This movement across two terms is not without reason as the Chinese character for human nature (性) is comprised in part by the character for heart-mind (心 or 心). Benjamin Schwartz notes that "the center of Mencius' problematique in dealing with man is really *not* the nature, (*xing*) but the heart/mind (*xin*)" (Schwartz 1985: 266; see also 288ff.; Ch'en 1953; Graham 1967; Ahern 1980: 183). The gist of Schwartz's comments is that, for Mencius, the heart-mind is at the core of what is naturally human. Of the heart-mind, the text states:

For a man to give full realization to his heart (*xin*) is for him to understand his own nature, and a man who knows his own nature will know Heaven (*tian*). By retaining his heart and nurturing his nature he is serving Heaven . . . (*Mencius* 7A:1; trans. Lau, *Mencius*, 1979b: 287).

Xin is the capacity that handles intellection, cognition, judgment, feelings and affect. *Mencius* 2A:6 presents four dimensions of *xin*, each with its corresponding manifestations:

¹⁴ The *Zhongyong* had traditionally been attributed to Confucius' grandson, Zisi. However, the scholarly literature now dates it as a text of the Qin or early Han, though with some sections of much earlier origin. De Bary and Bloom's compilation of texts includes translated sections of the text as well as commentary on them (*Sources*, 1999: 333–9).

- Compassion is a manifestation of benevolence (*ren*).
- Disapprobation is a manifestation of righteousness (*yi*).
- Deference is a manifestation of behavioural propriety (*li*).
- Approval and disapproval are manifestations of wisdom (*zhi*).

These four roots (*siduan*) of human goodness are “given,” in the same way a person has four limbs (*Mencius* 2A:6). These dimensions of the heart-mind are basic moral feelings, a key element of Mencius’ philosophy. The term *qing*, often translated as “feelings,” seems to refer to these basic moral emotions, taken collectively. In *Mencius* 6A:6, *qing* provides the impetus for a person to practise the good: “from the feelings [*qing*] proper to it, [human nature] is constituted for the practice of what is good” (trans. Legge, *Chinese Classics*, 1991, vol. 2: 402; annotations by author).¹⁵ Here, again, the Guodian corpus provides more depth to Mencius’ discussions. In the *Xing Zi Ming Chu*, feelings are also a part of human nature, and there are variations in the entire corpus concerning which emotions are constitutive of *qing* (Chen 2010: 38–9).

Qing has another possible meaning, however, signifying what is “genuine.” The two meanings of *qing*, feelings and genuine (condition), were used interchangeably and are not necessarily inconsistent, in texts of this period. Interpreting *qing* as genuine, the same passage in *Mencius* 6A:6 may be translated as: “As for what they are inherently [*qing*], they can become good. This is what I mean by calling their natures good” (trans. Van Norden, *Mengzi*, 2008: 149; annotations by author). If we adopt this interpretation of *qing*, it follows that the reason for saying “human nature is good” is because the capacity to become good is a genuine – *real* – condition of humanity. Graham explains this sense of *qing* in relation to Aristotle’s essence: “The *qing* of X is what makes it a genuine X, what every X has and without which would not be an X; in this usage *qing* is surprisingly close to the Aristotelian “‘essence’” (1967: 262). Shun Kwong-Loi proposes an account of *qing* that is more sensitive to the *Mencius* as it avoids the appeal to Aristotelian essence. Shun proposes that *qing* is “the way things really are, [referring to] certain characteristic tendencies of a class of things that obtain of each individual member of that class and reveal what things of that class are really like” (1997: 215).

¹⁵ The understanding of *qing* as “feelings” is supported by Zhu Xi’s (1130–1200) comment on the dialogue (see Van Norden, *Mengzi*, 2008: 149). Zhu Xi was a prominent neo-Confucian thinker whose commentaries on the classical texts were extremely influential.

Yet these natural capacities are not enough, according to Mencius, and their development is critical. The external environment can throw distractions in the heart-mind's path:

Mengzi said, "In years of plenty, most young men are gentle; in years of poverty, most young men are violent. It is not that the potential that Heaven confers on them varies like this. They are like this because of what sinks and drowns their hearts." (*Mencius* 6A:7; trans. Van Norden, *Mengzi*, 2008: 150)

This view contrasts with the one proposed by Mencius' imaginary interlocutor. On their view, variations in human conduct – both moral and immoral actions – are fully accounted for by environmental factors. But Mencius draws the line differently: good is to be found in human nature, while external conditions provide the impetus for unacceptable behaviours. Therefore, even though humans naturally have the capacity for goodness, to do nothing about these distractions will eventually harm the heart-mind. To illustrate this, Mencius mentions an analogy with the way in which the trees on Niu Mountain, if not nurtured, fail to recover even though they receive some natural nourishment such as the overnight dew (*Mencius* 6A:8). Therefore, nurture (*yang*) of the naturally given roots of goodness is critical. Nurture begins with the shaping of *qi*, the idea of life-force that figures in the discussion between Mencius and Gaozi. In both the *Mencius* and the *Guanzi*, a text belonging to the Legalist tradition, *qi* is said to "fill the body" (*Mencius* 2A:2; "Xin Shu Xia" in the *Guanzi*; trans. Rickett, *Guanzi*, 1998: 59). The *Mencius* draws a close connection between *qi* and a person's will (*zhi*):

Your will is the commander of the *qi*. *Qi* fills the body. When your will is fixed somewhere, the *qi* sets up camp there. Hence, it is said, "Maintain your will. Do not injure the *qi*." (*Mencius* 2A:2; trans. Van Norden, *Mengzi*, 2008: 38)

What does it mean to fix the will so that *qi* will be lodged there? One way to explain this is to draw a connection between fixing the will and cultivating the heart-mind.¹⁶ Just prior to this comment quoted above, the passage states that the cultivated heart-mind does not move (*budong xin*). To say that

¹⁶ This passage draws a close connection between nurturing *qi* (*yangqi*) and training the will (*chizhi*) (described in Chan 2002: 54). There are disagreements in then-contemporaneous texts on the view that *xin* can control the will. See, for example, the *Guodian Xing Zi Ming Chu*, which states that "heart-minds have no (fixed) inclinations" (strip 1; trans. Cook, *Bamboo Texts*, 2012: 697).

a cultivated heart-mind is fixed means that it is not susceptible to distractions from the external environment. Correspondingly, to say that one's *qi* is lodged in this way suggests that it has been appropriately nurtured and it now has a moral focus (Chan 2002: 43–59; Shun 1997: 72–6). As we will see in Chapter 8, this notion of a fixed heart-mind is criticised by Zhuangzi, a Daoist thinker, who is wary of the lack of flexibility in such an approach to human conduct and life. Indeed, as the conversation proceeds in the passage above, Mencius remarks that he is good at cultivating his “floodlike *qi*” (*haoran zhi qi*). For Mencius, these resources are not limited to a chosen few; they are available to everyone. He maintains the universality of the naturally given heart-mind which rightly feels compassion in certain situations. “We and the sage are of the same kind,” he proclaims (*Mencius* 6A:7; trans. Van Norden, *Mengzi*, 2008: 150). In the following section, we investigate this goodness shared by all individuals and how it is extended in moral practice.

Not All Humans Are Naturally Inclined towards Goodness

That there are beginnings of goodness in all humanity is a central aspect of Mencius' philosophy. Mencius evokes the example of *anyone* feeling distress when they see a child about to fall into a well to illustrate this point (*Mencius* 2A:6). The heart-mind is the source of the distress; Mencius makes it clear that the feeling is not caused by any “external” factors, for instance, if one sought to please the child's parents, or to be praised by neighbours and friends, or to avoid a poor reputation. The feeling of distress also arises in another conversation, one that Mencius has with King Xuan about how the King treats his people. Mencius finds out that the King was distressed on one occasion when he saw an ox being led to slaughter:

The King was sitting in the hall. He saw someone passing below, leading an ox. The King noticed this and said, “Where is the ox going?” “The blood of the ox is to be used for consecrating a new bell.” “Spare it. I cannot bear to see it shrinking with fear, like an innocent man going to the place of execution.” “In that case, should the ceremony be abandoned?” “That is out of the question. Use a lamb instead.” (*Mencius* 1A:7; trans. Lau, *Mencius*, 1979b: 15)

Commenting on this account, Mencius notes that King Xuan's compassion for the ox was sufficient evidence that he was a worthy King. Mencius concluded that the King's distress was based on the fact that, he “once

having seen the ox alive, cannot bear to see it die, and once having heard its cry, cannot bear to eat its flesh” (*Mencius*1A:7; adapted from the translation by Lau, *Mencius*, 1979b: 17). This initial plaudit turns into criticism, however. Mencius notes the inconsistency between the King’s compassion for the ox and his lack of compassion for his people, saying, “Your [compassion] is sufficient to reach the animals, yet the benefits of your government fail to reach the people” (*ibid.*: 17–18; annotations by author). Mencius proposes that the King’s failure to feel compassion for his people was not a question of ability (*neng*), for this ability was present in his reaction upon seeing the ox led to slaughter. Mencius boldly suggests that the King’s problem was one of willingness (*wei*). To rectify this situation, Mencius suggests that the King:

... take this very heart-mind here (in relation to the ox) and apply it to that (the people). Hence one who extends his compassion can attend to those within the Four Seas; one who does not extend compassion cannot attend even to his wife and children. The one thing in which the ancients greatly surpassed others is to extend what they did. Why is it then that your compassion is sufficient to reach animals, yet the benefits of your government fail to reach the people? Is this an exception? (*Mencius* 1A:7; adapted from the translation by Lau, *Mencius*, 1979b: 19)

What exactly should King Xuan have extended (*tui*)? As this passage does not elaborate on the nature of the extension, there are a few ways in which we may understand it. The “extension” may be understood as a reasoning strategy, that is, to reason analogously from the case of the ox to that of the people. That brings a question to the fore: what are the relevant similarities in the two cases and what is to be extended? This may be teased out in different ways. One approach is to suggest that the “extension” occurs in deliberative processes, in particular, in analogical moral reasoning. For example, we could say that the King needs to “extend” his moral reasoning by refining his judgement of situations, his sensitivity to relevantly similar situations, and by cultivating a readiness to respond as the situation calls for it (Wong 2002). Alternatively, extension may involve the refinement of intuitions by using analogical reasoning, to a point where one both reflects on the case at hand and delights in having the right responses (Hutton 2002).

The allusion to analogy might be problematic because there is some ambiguity concerning whether Mencius approves of the King’s compassion for the ox. It may be that Mencius disagrees with the King’s compassion for

the ox, in which case reasoning by analogy is not the right way to proceed (McRae 2011). Hence, another approach to the extension is to suggest that what is “internal” – the feeling of compassion – be made to manifest in the King’s behaviours. According to this view, while goodness is naturally given, its *realisation* in a person’s behaviour cannot be taken for granted. Hence the cultivation of the heart-mind to weigh up situations is necessary to extend humanity’s naturally given goodness (see Ivanhoe 2002; McRae 2011). This understanding avoids a major problem with some of the interpretations above, which assume that elements of contemporary philosophical analysis (including logical consistency, analogical reasoning or emotional intuition) were present in Mencius’ philosophy.

The *Mencius*’ view of human nature begins positively in a theory of universal, naturally given goodness. It culminates in an optimistic vision of an ethical, well-governed society. Although the lack of elaboration in many of its passages may not withstand the scrutiny of contemporary philosophical analysis, the tenor of its ideas and its utopic society resulting from humane, benevolent government would have had much popular appeal in the climate of unrest during its time. Some aspects of its views continue to be relevant in contemporary debates. These include the integrated picture of the heart-mind – and, indeed, of morality – as having cognitive, evaluative and affective dimensions *all at once*, and the emphasis on nurturing human responsiveness to others so as to bring to fruition a fuller realisation of one’s moral emotions. Many of the *Mencius* views seem to stand in contrast to those in the *Xunzi*. We explore the key themes of Xunzi’s philosophy in the following section.

Xunzi: Shaping Humanity

Xunzi (Xun Kuang) is often hailed as the most scrupulous of the early Confucian thinkers because of the comprehensive synthesis reflected in the *Xunzi*. The thirty-two-chapter work bearing his name engaged with the views of Kongzi, Mozi, Mencius, Shen Dao, Shen Buhai, Song Xing, Zhuangzi, Hui Shi and Gongsun Long, criticising the deficiencies of some of these views while also drawing from their strengths. Because its conclusions synthesise ideas from a range of thinkers, the *Xunzi*’s views stretch the limits of what may be properly considered to belong to the Confucian tradition. For example, the

Analects rejected penal law (*fa*) as an instrument of government while the *Xunzi* endorsed its deterrent effects.

In contrast to Mencius' positive assessment of human nature, Xunzi's views are notably pessimistic. His discussion on *xing* is entitled "Human nature is bad" ("Xing E"). The *Xunzi* poses a counter-example to Mencius' child-about-to-fall-into-a-well example. It visualises two brothers vying for property, each of whom is self-serving at best. Xunzi notes that such selfishness is pervasive and argues for reform through a highly regulated socio-political context. He has a bleak picture of human nature to begin with:

Human nature is bad; any good in humans is acquired by conscious effort. Now, human nature is like this: being born with a love of profit, and abiding by it, causes aggressive and greedy tendencies to grow and courtesy and deference to disappear; being born with feelings of envy and dislike, and indulging them, causes violence and crime to develop and loyalty and trustworthiness to perish; being born possessing the desires of the ears and eyes (which are fond of sounds and colours), and indulging them, causes dissolute and wanton behaviour to result and propriety and rightness, refinement and natural patterns to perish . . . Thus, it is necessary that man's nature undergoes the transformative influences of teachers and models (*fa*) and that he be guided by propriety and rightness. Only after this has been accomplished do courtesy and deference develop. Unite these qualities with refinement and natural patterns, and the result is an age of orderly government . . . Thus, a warped piece of wood must first await application of the press-frame, steam to soften it, and force to bend its shape before it can be made straight. A dull piece of metal must first be whetted on the grindstone before it can be made sharp. (*Xunzi* 23 "Xing E"; adapted from the translation by Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 1994: 150–1)

The phrase "*xing e*" is often translated as "human nature is evil." However, notions often associated with evil, such as malevolence, wickedness and viciousness, are not apparent in this passage. Here, there are descriptions of what is meant by "*e*": a love of profit, feelings of envy and dislike, and being led by the ears and eyes (rather than by the heart-mind). These seem to be self-serving rather than inherently evil actions. Undesirable outcomes arise for both self and society if people follow their naturally given, self-serving, inclinations.

How might we account for Mencius' and Xunzi's seemingly contradictory statements on human nature? One approach is to narrow the gap between

the two. The *Mencius*' notion of *xing* includes the heart-mind and excludes desires, while the *Xunzi* excludes the heart-mind and includes desires (Ch'en 1953). According to this explanation, the difference in the two views is insignificant and may be explained away by differences in their scope of *xing*. However, this analysis glosses over important differences in the texts' views on the nature of cultivation, social institutions and government. Other accounts maintain that there are significant disagreements in the two views (Graham 1967, 1989; Munro 1969: 78–9; Ahern 1980; Goldin 2000). An influential version of this thesis proposed by Graham states that Xunzi's *xing* refers to what is naturally existing, from birth, whereas Mencius' *xing* also incorporates the nurture and development of the natural tendencies (Graham 1989: 244–51). One important implication of this view is that the *Xunzi* is not actually criticising the views in the *Mencius* when it purports to do so.

In light of the disagreements between Mencius and Gaozi described above, the *Xunzi*'s views are compatible with Gaozi's assertion that *xing* does not in and of itself supply resources for morality and that humans need to look to external sources for moral guidance and cultivation. Some of the Guodian texts also express support for this view (e.g. *Xing Zi Ming Chu*, strips 3–4, 9; *Yucong* 1, strips 22–3; and *Liude*, strip 26). Gaozi's fundamental point is that *xing* is neither good nor bad to begin with. *Yucong* 2 in the Guodian corpus provides a more complex view, stating that a range of features is found in human nature: feelings, knowledge, love, parental affection, joy, aversion to evil, resentment, fear, strength, weakness and desires (strips 1–4, 8–12, 20–37; Cook, *Bamboo Texts*, 2012: 849–55). But the *Xunzi* stands alone in its assertion that human nature is self-serving. Notwithstanding its unique starting point, the *Xunzi*, like the *Mencius*, makes room for the shaping of the heart-mind. Yet, here too, there are nontrivial differences between the two accounts of *xin*.¹⁷ In *Mencius*, nurture of the heart-mind takes precedence (*Mencius* 6A:11, 12), to the point that *xin* is unmoved by external distractions. In the *Xunzi*, not only is the heart-mind an important capacity, it is the ruler of all the other capacities. In the passage below, the heart-mind is animated and personified:

¹⁷ Philip Ivanhoe points out the different learning strategies implicated in each philosophy (Ivanhoe 1990). The philosophical distance between the two positions has persisted through developments in Chinese intellectual history and is manifest especially in Neo-Confucian thought (see Hansen 1992: 380 at note 16).

The [heart-]mind is the lord of the body and master of the spiritual intelligence. It issues commands but does not receive commands. On its own authority it forbids or orders, renounces or selects, initiates or stops. (*Xunzi* 21 “Jie Bi”; trans. Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 1994: 105; annotations by author)

The view that the heart-mind is the ruler of the other capacities is also shared by the Guodian text, *Wu Xing* (“The Five Conducts”), which states that “Ears, eyes, nose, mouth, hands, and feet are faculties that are governed by [the] heart-mind. When the heart-mind says ‘yes,’ none dares not to say ‘yes’” (strip 28; trans. Chan, S. 2011: 72). The *Wu Xing* is a significant text in relation to the Mencius-Xunzi debate because it shares elements with both the *Mencius* and the *Xunzi*. The passage above sees the heart-mind as the governing capacity, as is the case in the *Xunzi*. However, the *Wu Xing* also holds that conduct should ideally ensue from benevolence (*ren*), which originates from “within” – a theme that is characteristically Mencian (Cook, *Bamboo Texts*, 2012: 469–78).

In terms of how the heart-mind controls desires, the *Xunzi* alludes to *dao*, which guides the heart-mind, ensuring that it selects right objects of desire. As the ruler of the body, the heart-mind, when properly attuned to *dao*, will make the right choices:

It is natural to our inborn nature to have desires, and the mind acts to control and moderate them . . . As a general rule, when men choose, what they get is never only what they wanted; when they reject, what they lose is never only what they disliked. Thus a man should weigh and balance both before he acts . . . *Dao*, from antiquity to the present, has been the right balance. (*Xunzi* 22 “Zheng Ming”; trans. Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 1994: 135, 137)

The heart-mind makes distinctions so that it may accurately weigh and balance the variety of objects it desires. If the heart-mind is fixated on a trivial matter, confusion will arise (*huo qi xin*). The *Xunzi* gives a central place to the heart-mind in deliberation: in contrast to the senses, *xin* is capable of handling knowledge (*Xunzi* 22 “Zheng Ming”) (see Lee 2005: 33–56). Xunzi’s account of decision-making focuses heavily on discretion, a distinctive capacity of the heart-mind. Because the *Xunzi* emphasises the deliberative capacities of *xin* and its connection with knowledge, it has sometimes been translated as “mind” to distinguish it from the *Mencius* “heart-mind.” Yet we must not

ignore the fact that cultivation for Xunzi also involved nurturing proper human emotions. The following section examines the *Xunzi*'s proposals for cultivation: following the norms set up by sages through regulating names, recognising distinctions in society through practising propriety, and abiding by natural patterns to transform the mind.

Regulating Names, Practising Propriety and Transforming Human Nature

Xunzi proposed a number of measures for regulating human behaviour. These had to be implemented by teachers and sages because individuals are not able, by themselves, to rectify their self-serving tendencies. Nor do they have any naturally given motivation to do so, as the opening passage of the "Human nature is bad" chapter suggests. In this section, we examine some of these measures.

One common view in the Warring States texts was that the cause of unrest lay partly in the lack of standards (*fa*) in relation to values and human behaviour. The *Xunzi*, the *Zhuangzi*, the *Mozi* and texts associated with the Mingjia (debaters who focused on names) express this concern. Some of them, including the *Xunzi*, held that it was important to fix the meanings of names (*ming*), thereby providing clear standards for human behaviour and action. In the *Analects* and *Xunzi*, this measure is dubbed *zhengming* (rectifying names), although the term is used differently in the two texts. *Zhengming* in the *Analects* is not primarily concerned with semantic issues nor is it about the modification of titles, as its common translation "rectification of names" suggests.¹⁸ The belief was that names expressed normative standards of conduct such that those bearing particular names were obliged to attune their conduct accordingly (*Analects* 12:11; 12:19; 13:3). In the *Xunzi*, however, "rectifying names" is an appropriate translation of *zhengming*. The chapter "Zheng Ming" states that the meanings of names are merely customary, and, therefore, the ruler should fix their meanings so as to establish clear standards for behaviour:

¹⁸ *Zhengming* applies not only to the obligations of those who take on the more "public" socio-political roles but to obligations in relationships which have a distinctly more personal and private aspect.

Names have no intrinsic appropriateness. One agrees to use a certain name and issues an order to that effect, and if the agreement is abided by and becomes a matter of custom, then the name may be said to be appropriate, but if people do not abide by the agreement, then the name ceases to be appropriate. Names have no intrinsic reality. One agrees to use a certain name and issues an order that it shall be applied to a certain reality, and if the agreement is abided by and becomes a matter of custom, then it may be said to be a real name. (*Xunzi* 22 “Zheng Ming”; trans. Watson, *Hsün Tzu*, 1963: 138)

Xunzi is deeply aware of the extent of influence wielded by those in power. The potential for an inept or immoral ruler to manipulate the common people through this method is not insignificant. It is a possibility that the *Xunzi* considers only briefly, arguing that those who exploit the tool by recklessly making up new names and casting out the old – hence causing people to be deluded and confused – “is a terrible evil and should be punished” (*Xunzi* 22 “Zheng Ming”; trans. Watson, *Hsün Tzu*, 1963: 140). In positive terms, the creation of standards through the determination of word-meanings is a powerful instrument with which human behaviour may be regulated. *Xunzi* astutely suggests that the role of government is not to encourage people not to have desires but rather to manage the people’s expectations.¹⁹ One method of embedding behavioural standards into social practice was to promote *li*, norms of behavioural propriety, together with *yi*. In the *Xunzi*, these two terms appear together frequently, and it seems that the terms *li*, *yi* and *li-yi* are sometimes used interchangeably.²⁰ Standards of behaviour express social distinctions (*fen*) and

¹⁹ *Xunzi* writes, “All those who maintain that desires must be gotten rid of before there can be orderly government fail to consider whether desires can be guided, but merely deplore the fact that they exist at all. All those who maintain that desires must be lessened before there can be orderly government fail to consider whether desires can be controlled, but merely deplore the fact that they are so numerous . . . the possession or nonpossession of desires has nothing to do with good government or bad” (*Xunzi* 22 “Zheng Ming”; trans. Watson, *Hsün Tzu*, 1963: 150).

²⁰ Refer to Nivison’s note that “The term *li-yi* is almost a *Xunzi* trademark; for example, it is used over and over in his essay “Xing E” (“Human Nature Is Bad”) . . . The words *yi* and *li* are not synonyms, but *yi* has senses close enough to *li* so that sometimes *Xunzi* is uninterested in noticing any distinction between *li* and *li-yi*, as in the “Li Lun” text” (2000: 113).

differentiation (*bie*) so that people act according to where they stand in relation to others:

The former kings . . . established rituals [*li*] and *yi* in order to divide [*fen*] things among people, to nurture their desires and to satisfy their seeking . . . Meats and grains, the five flavors and the various spices are means to nurture the mouth. Fragrances and perfumes are means to nurture the nose . . . Thus, ritual is a means of nurture. The gentleman not only obtains its nurturing, but also loves its differentiations [*bie*]. What is meant by “differentiations”? I say: It is for noble and lowly to have their proper ranking, for elder and youth to have their proper distance, and for poor and rich, humble and eminent each to have their proper weights. (*Xunzi* 19 “Li Lun”; trans. Hutton, *Xunzi*, 2014: 201; annotations by author)

The fragrances nurture the nose just as other external stimuli nurture the different human capacities. By analogy, behavioural propriety nurtures correct human behaviour. The analogy is instructive: it reveals the *Xunzi*’s view that these implements for shaping human behaviour are external to human nature. Here, as in Gaozi’s case, *yi* is appropriately conceived of as “rightness” so as not to suggest an internal, naturally given capacity. It suggests that, for these thinkers, doing the *right* thing in each situation was an important consideration. Hence, cultivation plays a central role in *Xunzi*’s philosophy because it helps to shape human conduct. The nurturing processes apply to the mouth, nose, eyes, ears and body as well as to the cultivation of reliability (*xin*), authority (*wei*), safety (*an*), life (*sheng*), wealth (*cai*) and the emotions (*qing*) (*ibid.*: 202). Inculcation of propriety and rightness will eliminate self-serving behaviours, such as that in the case of brothers vying for property. It also has positive outcomes in encouraging amenability (*rang*) (*Xunzi* 4 “Rong Ru”; 23 “Xing E”).²¹

If passages such as this give the impression that compliance through behavioural propriety is the principal concern of the text, we need to keep

²¹ Perkins (2010) translates *yi* as “rightness” and suggests a helpful comparison between education in the *Xunzi* and the *Xing Zi Ming Chu*. In both texts, *qing* is considered “inner” and *yi* as external. Perkins describes a passage in the *Xing Zi Ming Chu* as expressing the view that “Knowing *qing* entails knowing how to express feelings outwardly in proper form, while knowing rightness means being able to internalize it to align our genuine feelings” (2010: 23). The view that ritual and music are instrumental in the shaping of human emotions is also expressed in the *Yucong* 2 (see Chan, S. 2011: 71).

in mind that the *Xunzi* values *li* not for its own sake but instrumentally, in shaping humanity and bringing about order (*zhi*). In the passage below, behavioural propriety is instrumental in the realisation of social harmony. Dubs' translation captures the aesthetic dimension of the *Xunzi*'s *li*:

Li is human emotion expressed, harmonized, and beautified so as to become a pattern for all. It uses the features, the voice, food, garments, and dwellings, and gives each their appropriate means of expressing emotion. As a pattern, *Li* aids those whose expression of sorrow would be too little, and those whose expression of sorrow would be too violent, alike to reach a golden mean. By means of *Li*, the degenerate son is kept from becoming worse than a beast, and the over-sensitive man is prevented from injuring himself. *Li* is the beautifying of man's original nature by means of acquired characteristics which could not be acquired of themselves. (*Xunzi* 14 "Zhi Shi"; trans. Dubs, Hsüntze, 1966: 146–7)

This passage gives a sense of the performance- and practice-orientation of *li*, which have aesthetic dimensions. It also emphasises the centrality of ritual practice to the attunement of human desires. But what are they attuned to? Is there a suggestion of some deeper, underlying reality within the *Xunzi*'s program for rectification? This depends on whether we hold that the *Xunzi* is primarily focused on the efficacy of collective human action or that it grounded this concern in a more fundamental moral commitment to *dao* (the Way). According to the latter view, the text has deeper metaphysical commitments and is not primarily committed to pragmatic or socio-political considerations. This view is presented by Paul Goldin in the following way:

... the rituals are right because they embody the Way of Humanity, and not merely because the Sages dictated them. Other systems of social control – such as law codes established by human rulers – cannot bring about the same results, because they do not necessarily accord with the Way. The consequence of this view, which scholars have not always appreciated, is that for *Xunzi*, the Way is paramount, not the rituals – for it is the Way that determines the rituals. (2000: 125; see also Goldin 1999: 104)

Those who take this stance will resist a reading of the *Xunzi* as primarily concerned with the imposition of standards on human behaviour. This debate has important implications for the question of whether *Xunzi*'s views are more Confucian or Legalist (see Lee 2005: 74–8).

Another dimension of Xunzi's philosophy is music (*yue*), the ethico-aesthetic fabric of society. In the *Analects*, music is an indispensable part of ritual (*Analects* 11:26; 13:3; 17:11). It permeates and reflects existing conditions in society (*Analects* 15:11). Music, together with behavioural propriety, are distinctively *human* pursuits (*Analects* 3:3; 7:14; 9:15; 17:11). The *Xunzi* shares this view of music in the socio-political domain but it also articulates how music is interwoven into personal moral life:

Music is joy. The gentleman takes joy in attaining [*dao*]. The petty man takes joy in attaining the object of his desires. If one takes [*dao*] to regulate one's desires, then one will be happy and not disordered. If one forgets [*dao*], for the sake of one's desires, then one will be confused and unhappy . . . When music proceeds, then the people will turn towards what is correct. Thus, music is the height of ordering people, but Mozi denounces it!

Music, moreover, is unchanging harmony and [*li*] is unalterable order. Music unites that which is the same, and [*li*] distinguishes that which is different. Together the combination of [*li*] and music governs the human heart. (*Xunzi* 20 "Yue Lun"; trans. Hutton, *Xunzi*, 2014: 221; annotations by author)

This passage highlights a few dimensions of music. Music and behavioural propriety guide the heart-mind and are therefore effective for bringing about social order. Implicit in this view is an assumption that people are responsive to music in a way that shapes their moral outlook. Although it is not stated explicitly in this passage, not all music is acceptable. The *Analects*, for instance, highlights music that is to be shunned (15:11). Like other texts of the period, notably the *Zuo Zhuan*, the *Xunzi*'s conception of music crosses over a number of domains – the cosmological, spiritual, social, political and personal – and brings them together into a framework of harmony (Brindley 2012: 12–21). As we might expect, the discussions in these early texts do not provide sophisticated details on the nature of the causal or correlative connections across the domains. Nevertheless, some interesting assumptions are laid out, including the *Xing Zi Ming Chu*'s view that music stirs the emotions (strips 23–26; see also Brindley 2006). If we allow that the *Xunzi*'s references to music incorporate elements of spiritual and cosmological order, this would lend weight to the assertion that the text is not just concerned with the rectification of human behaviour for socio-political ends.

Although the *Xunzi* is distinctive among contemporaneous texts in its statement that there are no resources within human nature that incline it

towards goodness, its optimism about the transformative potential of socio-political institutions and cultural forms is uplifting. It takes its stand with the *Mencius* on the availability of self-cultivation for all. While the *Mencius* emphasises the universality of naturally given goodness, the *Xunzi* stresses that self-cultivation is a possibility for all humans:

Any person in the street can become (like) Yu. What does this mean? I reply: What made the sage emperor Yu a Yu, was the fact that he exercised *ren* and rightness and abided by standards and what was correct . . . Any person in the street is able to grasp *ren*, rightness, standards and correctness and has the ability to practice *ren*, rightness, standards and correctness. (*Xunzi* 23 “Xing E”; adapted from the translation by Hutton, *Xunzi*, 2014: 254)

This passage states explicitly that all humans have the ability to undertake practices that shape the self. More important than its negative statement on *xing* is its focus on the resources that are available to humanity for self-cultivation, including behavioural propriety, music, rightness, models, teachers, sages and *dao*. Burton Watson comments on the contrast between *Xunzi*’s original nature and its subsequent development: “To this dark initial thesis *Xunzi* contraposes the almost unlimitedly bright possibilities for improvement through study and moral training” (1963: 5). *Mencius*’ and *Xunzi*’s commitment to the perfectibility of the common person would have seemed progressive within a social milieu that was highly conscious of rank and status. To say that all humans are capable of self-cultivation is to present the *possibility* for individuals to transcend their ordinary beginnings.

The Way of *Tian* and the Ways of Humanity

Not a few texts in the pre-Qin period proposed that *tian* was the source of human nature. However, there are important differences in their views on *tian* as the source, or a source, of moral goodness, and the appropriate responses of humanity to this. We have already seen, for example, *Mencius*’ disagreement with Gaozi about whether *yi*, rightness, is part of what is “given” in human nature. In this section, we attempt to fill out this picture by considering a set of related questions. In what way is *tian* the source of moral goodness? What is the nature of *tian*’s agency, if *tian* is agentive? What is the reach of *tian* in relation to events in the world? What is the responsibility of human beings in response to *tian*? Given the nature of the

Warring States debates and the texts we are working with, the investigation below will throw up specific details rather than a generalised view of ideas during the time.

We have seen that the *Mencius* upholds the *tian*-endowed inclination towards goodness, which entails that the right human response is to nurture the heart-mind. To say that moral capabilities or inclinations are endowed, and that a response is required, seems to suggest that *tian* is an intentional agent. Yet there remains some uncertainty because *tian* in Warring States thought may also be conceived in naturalistic terms. According to this view, *tian* is simply the way things *are*, broadly encompassing the conditions of life, of what is available to humanity and what constrains it. The term *ming* – often translated “fate” or “destiny” – also sheds light on these two possible interpretations of *tian*. *Ming* has a range of meanings in early Confucianism. It may refer to a person’s fate or destiny, *tian*’s mandate for a person or a state and, loosely, a normative ideal for humanity.²² In relation to individuals, *ming* may refer to the conditions of life, including the opportunities and constraints that might arise from a person’s physical, emotional and physiological constitution, as well as from his or her environmental, social and political contexts.²³ In Warring States texts, a person’s *ming* may be construed in terms of her “allotment,” what she has received, so to speak, from life’s conditions or, alternatively, through divine design. The *Mencius* expresses a tripartite connection between *tian*, human nature and *ming* (*tian*’s ordinances): in nourishing their natures, humans serve *tian*; in cultivating themselves, they establish *tian*’s ordinances (*Mencius* 7A:1). However, the exact nature of these connections is not clearly articulated in the text.²⁴

²² Refer to Slingerland 1996 for a discussion of the different meanings of *ming* and its role in the debates between “inner” and “outer.”

²³ The notion of *ming* is the central focus in the *Guodian Xing Zi Ming Chu*. Its opening paragraph, which begins with a statement of its title, says: “Human nature derives from *ming*; *ming* is imparted from *tian*” (*Xing Zi Ming Chu*, strips 1–5, trans. author, adapted from Cook’s translation, *Bamboo Texts*, 2012: 697–700).

²⁴ Some of the discussions in the *Yucong* 2 and 3 include more complexity. For example, *Yucong* 2 points out that desires are part of human nature (*xing*), and desires give rise to scheming behaviours, greed, negligence, indulgence and anxiety (strips 10–19; Cook, *Bamboo Texts*, 2012: 855–7). *Yucong* 3 incorporates another dimension to *tian*, as the source of patterns for all things: “Heaven provides the models; humans and all things follow these patterns” (strip 17; trans. author; *Guodian Chumu Zhujian* 1998: 209). Shirley Chan argues that the use of the term *li* (patterns) in the *Guodian* corpus signifies a move

Regardless of how we understand *tian* in Mencius' philosophy, Mencius' view of human nature occupies one end of the spectrum as it sees *tian* as a *sufficient* source of human goodness, albeit one that requires further development. Unlike more commonly held views, for example, those expressed in some of the Guodian texts discussed previously, Mencius draws a sharp line between the sources of goodness (that it is naturally given) and immoral behaviours (that these are due to external factors). That Mencius' view is a minority view may help explain why, in justifying its own position, the text dwells at length on the views of its opponents.²⁵ In his examination of the connections between human nature and *tian*, Chen Lai notes that quite a few followers of Confucius held a different view: "Shizi, Qi Diao Zi, Mi Zi and Gongsun Nizi all claimed 'human nature has good and has bad,' which became the mainstream pre-Qin Confucian theory of human nature" (Chen 2010: 46). The tightly drawn connection between *tian* and moral goodness creates a unique problem for the *Mencius* in terms of how it explains adverse circumstances. If the seeds of human goodness are laid out by *tian*, how might the text explain events that are "bad," or when things have gone wrong, or worse, where *tian* might be thought to have violated moral norms? *Mencius* 2B:13 states that humans are not to reproach *tian*. Here, especially, it seems that *tian* is an intentional agent that brings about certain events, including starvation and hardship, upon individuals.²⁶

towards more detailed metaphysical considerations than we have seen so far in the extant texts. Chan writes: "The notion of *li* 理 (ordered patterns) as "reasoning principles/patterns" and "managing things in compliance with the essence of patterns and inherent principles" is introduced [here] . . . *tian* is not only the source or cause of existence of all things and phenomena, it also prescribes the embodied patterns (with principles and reasoning) in the process of the formation of things . . ." (2011: 67).

²⁵ The Mencian view of human nature has long been accepted as the orthodox view (e.g. see Yi 2015). Chen Lai makes a significant proposal that, in light of the Guodian views, it is not viable to maintain that there was a single, orthodox, Confucian view of human nature, even from as early as the period of the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing*) (Chen 2010: esp. 43–9). This is compatible with the fact that different conceptions of human nature were dominant at different times in Chinese history. Refer to Chan, S. 2011 and 2012 for more details on the different views in the Guodian texts.

²⁶ For example, *Mencius* 6B:15 states: "...Heaven, when it is about to place a great burden on a man, always first tests his resolution, exhausts his frame and makes him suffer starvation and hardship, frustrates his efforts so as to shake him from his mental lassitude, toughen his nature and make good his deficiencies" (trans. Lau, *Mencius* 1979b: 284–5). The views expressed in the Guodian *Qiong Da Yi Shi* ("Poverty or Success

There was a contemporaneous view that avoided a rift between *tian* and the ways of humanity. This proposal, attributed to Yang Zhu, forged a close alignment between *tian*-endowed nature and the norms of humanity. In the pre-Qin texts, Yang Zhu's ideas are often described by his opponents in a derogatory manner. The *Mencius* complains that Yang Zhu's self-serving attitude is detrimental to society because he renounces the authority of the ruler in favour of looking after himself (*Mencius* 3B:9). In the *Liezi* (c. 300 CE), a later text which seems to share the negativity towards Yang Zhu's view, Yang Zhu is caricatured as selfish and unable directly to answer the question, "If you could help the whole world at the cost of one hair of your body, would you do it?" (Graham 1978: 16; see also *Mencius* 7A:26). Probably due to representations like this, Yang Zhu's theory has often been ignored in scholarship. Moreover, our access to Yang Zhu's ideas is limited; we know of them only through brief mentions in other texts. In one of the texts, however, we get a more nuanced view of the preservation of *xing*. The *Lüshi Chunqiu* (*Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals*; c. 240 BCE), a text which synthesised a range of views, presents an account of *xing* that involves living life to its full term.²⁷ It proposes that "the best life is to live out one's full span in good health, enjoying the pleasures of the senses to the last ... A ruler should on no account sacrifice the fulfilment of his personal life to considerations of state; a private individual should not accept the Empire itself as a gift at the least risk to his health or security" (Graham 1967: 13). The view set out here does not encourage unwillingness to make sacrifices for one's country. Rather, it emphasises the need to avoid avarice in keeping one's nature intact. In this light, we should note that there is some ambiguity in the original phrase in the *Liezi*, concerning whether one might sacrifice a hair to *profit* or to *gain* the empire.²⁸ On the second alternative, Yang Zhu,

Is a Matter of Timing" also reflect some resignation to the turn of events or one's circumstances, whether positive or negative. Refer to Cook's discussion of this aspect of the text, at note 19 (*Bamboo Texts*, 2012: 440). Refer to the discussion by Perkins (2014: 116–50). Refer also to Puett's comment about Heaven's violation of moral norms (Puett 2002: 144; cited in Perkins 2014: 118).

²⁷ It refers to this theme in five of its chapters: 1.2 "Ben Sheng"; 1.3 "Zhong Ji"; 2.2 "Gui Sheng"; 2.3 "Qing Yu"; and 21.4 "Shen Wei"; see Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals of Lü Buwei*, 2000.

²⁸ Shun Kwong-loi explores Graham's suggestion that Yang Zhu's view is less negative than the way it is portrayed in the *Mencius*. The question posed in the *Liezi* is framed in terms of whether Yang Zhu would sacrifice a hair to benefit the empire. The phrase "以濟一世"

or one who holds views like his, is not the “hedonist” or “egoist” he is often described to be, for all he is promoting is that one should not sacrifice one’s original nature to *gain* the empire. To keep one’s life intact is to nurture *xing* through not seeking external possessions or over-indulging the appetites; possessions and indulgences are external to *xing*.

If we follow this reading of Yang Zhu’s view, the *Lüshi Chunqiu*-Yang Zhu conception of human nature – what it is, and what it should become – is aligned with *tian*. However, there is a major difference between this view and that of the Confucians. Simply to *preserve* what is given is not sufficient even for Mencius. Confucian philosophy gives a central place to cultivation, which is primarily the shaping of *xing* in attunement with cultural and social norms developed through time and established in tradition. But how much is in the hands of humanity and where do we draw the line between *tian*’s actions and human responsibility? The *Qiong Da Yi Shi* (“Poverty or Success is a Matter of Timing”), a Guodian text, sets out the scope of the question succinctly: “There is that which is controlled by *tian*, and there is that which is within the power of man, and each has its separate lot” (*Qiong Da Yi Shi*, strips 1–8; trans. Cook, *Bamboo Texts*, 2012: 453).

We have seen previously that the *Mencius* runs into difficulties when it holds *tian* responsible for certain acts but maintains that *tian* is nevertheless not to be blamed. The *Xunzi*, by contrast, delineates what is properly human, and what properly belongs to *tian*, in its chapter “Discourse on Heaven” (“Tian Lun”). It limits the jurisdiction of *tian*, stating that it does not intervene in human affairs – unlike what is stated in the *Mencius*. The view in the *Xunzi* seems partly driven by pragmatic reasons. It exposes superstitious beliefs, stating that eclipses and erratic changes in climate are natural phenomena and not to be attributed to *tian* (“Tian Lun” 17.6). These unfounded anxieties are to be replaced with attentiveness to the affairs of the state that are within reach of human action:

is vague, however, and it may be understood as “to benefit the world” or “to gain (possession of) the world” (*Liezi* 7; trans. Graham 1990c: 148–9). Shun proposes that, according to the second understanding, Yang Zhu’s stance is that he is unwilling to injure himself (by giving up one hair) in order to *gain possession of* the world. This interpretation speaks for the centrality of the Yangist nurturing of life as being opposed to acquisitiveness, rather than Yang Zhu’s selfishness in refusing to serve in an official capacity. (Shun 1997: 35–7, 45).

If you respond to the constancy of [*tian*'s] course with good government, there will be good fortune; if you respond to it with disorder, there will be misfortune. If you strengthen the basic undertakings and moderate expenditures, [*tian*] cannot impoverish you. If your nourishment is complete and your movements accord with the season, then [*tian*] cannot afflict you with illness. If you conform to [*dao*] and are not of two minds, then [*tian*] cannot bring about calamity. Accordingly, flood and drought cannot cause famine, cold and heat cannot cause sickness, and inauspicious and freak events cannot cause misfortune. ("Tian Lun" 17.1; trans. Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 1994: 14; annotations by author)

This passage affirms the centrality of a resolute mind-heart in Xunzi's philosophy, one that is firmly focused on the capabilities of humanity and the potential of human action to influence the human condition. This passage could give the impression that Xunzi's conception of *tian* is primarily naturalistic.²⁹ While texts like the *Mencius* attribute certain events and states of affairs to *tian*, it seems that the *Xunzi* delimits its scope. It is on this basis that some scholars hold that the *Xunzi* lacks a religious dimension. However, the passage above, and others like it in the text, may not be rejecting the place of *tian* per se. It may be that the text sees the potential of superstitious beliefs and practices to generate erroneous beliefs and therefore act as obstacles to effective action. Indeed, a chapter of the text is devoted to "Dispelling Blindness" ("Jie Bi") (Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 1994). The point of the passage above seems to be that appropriate action can begin only if the potential for humans to turn situations around is properly understood. There are other elements in the text that lend weight to the argument that Xunzi's *tian* is not obviously a naturalistic one. The *Xunzi*'s references to ritual, music and attunement with *dao* have been understood as being irreducibly religious (see Radcliffe-Brown 1965; Machle 1993, 2014; Ivanhoe 2014).

These attempts to set out the domains of responsibility and action for *tian* and humanity were extended by later Confucian thinkers. During the Han period, correlations and alliances were forged between humanity, *tian* and Earth (*di*), carving out different but co-dependent domains for each. For example, the *Zhongyong* sets out how equilibrium (*zhong*) and commonality

²⁹ Knoblock's translation of the title of this chapter of the *Xunzi*, "Discourse on Nature" ("Tian Lun") suggests that he views *tian* in more naturalistic terms. Refer also to the discussion in Perkins 2014: 184–218.

(*yong*) are attained. The practice of sincerity (*xin*) by humanity brings together a tripartite unity:

Only that one in the world who is most perfectly sincere is able to give full development to his nature. Being able to give full development to his nature, he is able to give full development to the nature of other human beings and, being able to give full development to the nature of other human beings, he is able to give full development to the natures of other living things. Being able to give full development to the natures of other living things, he can assist in the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth; being able to assist in the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth; he can form a triad with Heaven and Earth. (*Zhongyong* 22; trans. de Bary and Bloom, *Sources*, 1999: 338)

These dimensions of humanity's cooperation with *tian* relate directly to the question on the respective domains and responsibilities of *tian* and humanity. In drawing this chapter to a close, we return to the conception of *xing*, human nature, upon which both Mencius and Xunzi have established their views of cultivation. The translation of *xing* as "human nature" – for want of a better phrase – fails to capture its dual meanings, of which one is the nature associated with birth and the other is the nature associated with growth. The etymology of *xing* involves the character *sheng*, which means both birth and growth.³⁰ Hence, *xing* may refer to *both* an incipient capacity *and* its continuing cultivation. Graham refers to a general imprecision of Chinese concepts in order to explain this dual meaning of *xing*:

Mencius in particular seems never to be looking back towards birth, always forward to the maturation of a continuing growth. This accords with one's general impression when groping towards an understanding of early Chinese concepts, that often they tend to be more dynamic than their nearest Western equivalents, and that English translation freezes them into immobility.³¹

³⁰ The character *xing* is comprised of two components, “心” (*xin*: heart-mind) and “生” (*sheng*: birth, growth). As the second component, *sheng*, can mean either birth or growth, the term *xing* could refer to either the nature of humanity, given at birth, or its continuing development, or both. Refer to the discussions in Schwartz 1985: 266 and Ho Hwang 1979: 201–9.

³¹ Graham (1990b): 7. The *Shuowen Jiezi* also emphasises the derivative meaning of *xing* from *sheng*, growth. Further, it states that the term derives from *xin*, the heart-mind (at p. 502). These derivatives taken together suggest cultivation, a continual growth, of the *xin*. This could indicate the influence of Mencian philosophy in the *Shuowen*'s explication of *xing*.

One way to express the two components of *xing* in Mencius' philosophy is to emphasise its biological and cultural aspects. Irene Bloom proposes that *xing* in the Mencius refers to shared (biological) qualities that all humans have in common and to the (cultural) refinement of these qualities, which individuals may have to different extents (Bloom 2002: 91). This articulation of Mencius' *xing* also helps set it apart from Xunzi's *xing*. The latter is not defined by inherent moral capacities or biologically based qualities but is explained in terms of a person's self-serving tendencies. Notwithstanding significant differences in their views, Mencius and Xunzi both offer proposals for the development of the self within a socio-political environment that encourages and enhances collective human well-being. Their optimism about human capabilities and potential, and the place of humanity in bringing about a flourishing society within a cosmic vision, were themes that persisted in Chinese intellectual history for centuries to come. Their perspectives on the roles of emotions and desire in human motivation and moral development continue to shed light on a range of issues in comparative philosophical debates, including on conceptions of a flourishing life; character and virtue; action, agency and responsibility; and the place of emotions in moral life (Yu et al. 2010; Angle and Slote 2013; Bruya 2015; King 2015).

Suggestions for Further Reading

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