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Source: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 1953, Vol. 15, No. 3 (1953), pp. 541-565

Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of School of Oriental and African Studies

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/608654>

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# Theories of Human Nature<sup>1</sup> in *Mencius* (孟子) and *Shyuntzzy* (荀子)<sup>2</sup>

By D. C. LAU

## I

THE problem of how human nature is constituted, we have good reason to believe, was current before Mencius<sup>3</sup> and, from the time of Shyuntzzy onward, has been one of the central problems throughout the history of Chinese philosophy. The point at issue between Mencius and Shyuntzzy has traditionally been taken to be something like this. There is a thing called human nature, which is good according to Mencius, but bad according to Shyuntzzy. The same thing cannot be both good and bad at the same time, hence at least one of the two philosophers must be wrong. That this was how most thinkers of subsequent ages understood the position can be seen from the remedies they recommended.

There were two ways of reconciling the conflicting views.

(1) Human beings can be divided into three grades. First come the sages who are purely good, last come the incorrigibly wicked, while in between, where all average people fall, who form the majority of mankind, are those who are

<sup>1</sup> The word here translated as 'human nature' is *shing* 性, which strictly speaking means merely 'the nature (of something)', but was used by Mencius (and probably before him) to mean specifically 'human nature'. However, the term '*ren shing* 人性' is also occasionally used (e.g. VIA. 1 and 2). It is certain that the word *shing* is etymologically either the same word as, or closely cognate with, the word *sheng* 生, which means 'to give birth to, to produce, to come into being'. For discussion of this problem, see the excellent work by the late Fuh Synian 傅斯年 *Shing Ming Guu Shiunn Biannjenq* 性命古訓辯證 (Commercial Press, 2nd ed., 1947).

<sup>2</sup> In this paper I propose to discuss theories of human nature as found in the books *Mencius* and *Shyuntzzy*. For this purpose it is unnecessary to consider the authorship and authenticity of these texts. That *Mencius* contains the genuine teachings of Mencius has rarely been called in question. The case of *Shyuntzzy* is, however, different. The fact that the present text duplicates to a considerable extent what is to be found in the *Lii Jih* (禮記), the *Dah Day Lii Jih* (大戴禮記) and the *Harn Shy Way Juann* (韓詩外傳) seems to show that *Shyuntzzy* is a work of a very heterogeneous nature. Fortunately in the present paper I draw mainly on two chapters of *Shyuntzzy*, viz. ch. 22, 'The Rectification of Names' (正名篇), and ch. 23, 'That Human Nature is Evil' (性惡篇), supplemented by only a few quotations from three other chapters. As the doctrine that human nature is evil, which is the concern of this paper, has since the earliest times been associated with the name of Shyuntzzy, there is a good chance that the passages I have used are more or less authentic. At any rate, the question of authenticity is of no great importance, as my purpose is philosophical rather than historical or textual. So long as the thought contained in these passages is of intrinsic interest, it matters little whether they were genuinely the work of Shyuntzzy or only attributed to him. However, having given this warning, I shall speak freely of what is said by Mencius and Shyuntzzy, and assume that I shall be understood as saying no more than that such and such is found in the books *Mencius* and *Shyuntzzy*.

<sup>3</sup> See Wang Chong 王充, *Luenn Herng* 論衡: 'Shyh Shyr (世碩) of the Jou (周) Dynasty considered that there are both good and bad in human nature, and that if the good nature in man is singled out for nurture then the good will develop, but if the bad is singled out for nurture then the bad will develop . . . He therefore wrote a book called *Yeang Shu* (養書). Fuh Tzyyiann (宓子賤), Chi Diaukai (漆雕開), Gongsuen Nitzzy (公孫尼子) and the like also discussed human nature, holding views which agreed with Shyh on some points and disagreed on others, but they all considered that there are both good and bad in human nature'. (四部叢刊 *Syh Buh Tsong Kan* (SBTK) ed. J. 3 pp. 14b-15a.)

capable of becoming either good or bad. This view is derived from two passages in the *Analects*: ‘The Master said, “By nature men are near to one another, but they move apart through training”’; and ‘The Master said, “Only the wisest and most stupid are unchangeable”’.<sup>1</sup> Wang Chong and Shyun Yueh 荀悅 subscribed to this view.<sup>2</sup> Wang Chong says:—「唯上智與下愚不移」(陽貨)

‘From Mencius down to Liou Shianq 劉向, there were great scholars with extensive learning, yet there was no agreement in their views concerning human nature. Only the followers of Shyh Shyr<sup>3</sup> and Gongsuen Nitzyy more or less grasped the correct view on the matter . . . Hence I consider that, in saying that human nature is good, Mencius considered only human beings who are above the average, while, in saying that human nature is evil, Suen Ching [i.e. Shyuntzyy] considered only those below the average.’<sup>4</sup>

In Shyun Yueh’s *Shen Jiann* 申鑒, we find the following:—

‘Someone asked about the mandate of heaven and human effort. The answer was, “There are three grades [of human beings], the high and the low are unchangeable, while in the middle there is room for human effort”’.<sup>5</sup>

(2) In the make-up of human beings, apart from *shing* (性 nature), there is a further factor *chyng* (情). *Shing* is good. *Chyng* is bad. Mencius had overlooked *chyng*, while Shyuntzyy had mistaken *chyng* for *shing*. Doong Jongshu 董仲舒, according to Wang Chong, held this view. ‘Doong Jongshu, having read the works of Mencius and Shyuntzyy, propounded his own view of *chyng* and *shing*, saying: “The great principles (*jing* 經) of heaven are in 陰 and *yang* 陽. The great principles in man are *chyng* and *shing*. *Shing* is born of *yang*, *chyng* is born of *in*. The nature of the *in* *chih* 陰氣 is mean; the nature of the *yang* *chih* 陽氣 is kind. Those who say human nature (*shing*) is good see only the *yang* in it; while those who say it is bad, see only the *in* in it”’.<sup>6</sup>

The solution suggested by the Song 宋 philosophers was essentially the same. There are two ingredients of human nature: *chih* 氣 and *shing* 性. *Chih* is of variable quality, but *shing* is always good.

‘I [i.e. the compiler] asked about the difference between the doctrines concerning *shing* as found in Confucius and Mencius. Answer: “The *shing* Mencius

<sup>1</sup> *Luencyu* xvii. 2 and 3, *SBTK*. ed. J. 9 p. 2a ll. 1–2.

<sup>2</sup> Although this view does not appear in the *Bor Huu Tong* 白虎通, Ban Gu 班固 makes use of this principle of grading human beings in his *Gwujin Renbeau* 古今人表 (*Hannshu*, J. 20), and further sub-divides each of the three grades into three.

<sup>3</sup> Omit the word 儒.

<sup>4</sup> *Luenn Herng*, J. 3 pp. 18b–19a.

<sup>5</sup> *SBTK*. ed. J. 5 p. 5a.

<sup>6</sup> *Luenn Herng*, J. 3 p. 17b. This is not found in the extant work of Doong Jongshu. In the *Chuenchiou Farnluh* 春秋繁露 we find a rather different view of human nature. My purpose here is merely to show that the dualist view was current in Hann times. Doong was considered, rightly or wrongly, by Wang Chong as holding this view.

talks about is the original state of *shing*. When Confucius says that by nature men are near to one another, he is talking about that with which they are endowed and which does not vary much. Human nature is always good . . . .” I further asked whether talent comes out of *chih*. Answer: “When the *chih* is pure the talent is good, when the *chih* is impure the talent is bad. One who has received the purest *chih* is a sage, while one who has received the most impure *chih* is a wicked man.”<sup>1</sup>

The terminology of the Song philosophers may differ from that of the Hsin scholars, but the idea behind their solution is the same. The same entity cannot be both good and bad. But if we add a further entity, then we can have one good and one capable of being bad. Both Mencius and Shyuntzyi erred in being aware of only one of the two, while Shyuntzyi further erred in taking *chih* at its worst.

What would Mencius and Shyuntzyi have said to these two methods of reconciliation? The first, I think, they would have rejected, because it accuses them of arriving at a general view of human nature from what is true of only a section of human beings—and a very small section at that—in Mencius’ case, the sages and, in the case of Shyuntzyi, the incorrigibly wicked, and that they both overlooked the average man, who makes up the majority of mankind. Both Mencius and Shyuntzyi are very explicit that what they say applies to all men alike.

Mencius says: ‘Things of the same kind are all alike. Why should we have doubts when it comes to men? The sage and I are of the same kind.’<sup>2</sup> Again, when he was told that a prince had sent someone to try to find out wherein he was different from other men, his reply was: ‘In what way should I be different from others? Even Yau and Shuenn are the same as others.’<sup>3</sup> Mencius was positive that every man could become a Yau or a Shuenn.<sup>4</sup>

Shyuntzyi was equally explicit on the point. ‘As far as the nature of all men is concerned, Yau and Shuenn on the one hand, and Jye and Jyr on the other, have the same nature, and the gentleman and the small man have the

<sup>1</sup> *Ell Cherng Chyuan Shu* 二程全書, 四部備要 *Syh Buh Bey Yaw* (SBBY) ed., *Ell Cherng Yi Shu* 二程遺書 J. 22A pp. 10b–11a. This distinction is sometimes alternatively stated as between the material nature (*chih jyr jy shing* 氣質之性) and the moral or rational nature (*yih lii jy shing* 義理之性). Ju Shi 朱熹 writes: ‘Mencius never mentioned the material nature of man. The greatest contribution Chertzyi 程子 made to morals in his discussion of human nature was his elucidation of this material nature. Once we bring in material nature, all the differences between those who discuss human nature disappear completely’. *Jutzzy Yeuley Jyiliueh* 朱子語類輯略, *Tsongshu Jyicherng* 叢書集成 ed. J. 1 p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Mencius*, VIA. 7, *SBTk*. ed. J. 11 p. 7b ll. 1–2; Legge, *Chinese Classics* (2nd ed., rev., Oxford, 1895) vol. ii pp. 404–5. All translations used are my own and, because I wish to make these translations as literal as possible, they are often written in English which is not very idiomatic, but I hope they are at least intelligible. References to Legge are, however, included for the convenience of the reader who may not otherwise have easy access to the Chinese texts.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit. IVB. 32, J. 8 p. 15b ll. 7–8; Legge, p. 340.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit. VIB. 2, J. 12 p. 2; Legge, p. 424.

same nature.’<sup>1</sup> He, too, was positive that every man was capable of becoming a Yeu.<sup>2</sup>

We see that both Mencius and Shyuntzzy insist on the universality of their doctrines. Human beings belong to the same kind, and have, therefore, a similar nature. What these philosophers have discerned in human nature is not incidental to it but is an essential part of human nature as found in every man, true of the man in the street as well as of Yau and Shuenn and Yeu. The suggestion that they have each overlooked one grade of human beings would therefore be unacceptable to them.

With regard to the second method, that of multiplying entities, it is not possible to be as definite in conjecturing what the reaction of Mencius and Shyuntzzy would have been, since views of this kind did not seem to have been current in their time. All one can say is that the word *chyng* appears only four times in *Mencius*, and of the four the use in IVB. 18 (‘When one’s reputation goes beyond what is really so 聲聞過情’) has nothing to do with human nature. As to the other three cases, it is exceedingly unlikely that the word was used as a technical term.

In *Shyuntzzy*, *chyng* is indeed a technical term, but it is said to be the ‘content’ of *shing*, which is defined purely formally. Hence it is quite impermissible, on Shyuntzzy’s definitions, to set up *chyng* as a second entity co-ordinate with *shing*.

All we can say is that the Hann dualism of *shing* and *chyng* belonged to a climate of thought quite different from that of either Mencius or Shyuntzzy. As to the Song philosophers they belonged to a climate of thought even more remote. The whole notion of *chih* as a sort of stuff of which everything in the universe is made was unknown to both Mencius and Shyuntzzy, and it would be idle to speculate on whether it would have meant anything to them or not.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Shyuntzzy* (SBTK. ed.) ch. 23 ‘That Human Nature is Evil’, J. 17 p. 9a ll. 6–7; Legge, p. 84. (All the chapters in *Shyuntzzy* I quote from have been translated by Prof. Homer H. Dubs in his *The Works of Hsüntze* (London, 1928), but as it does not contain the Chinese text I shall not give detailed references to it.) Elsewhere, in ch. 5, ‘Against Physiognomy 非相篇’, we find: ‘Past and present are the same [omit the word 度]. Things of the same kind, though they are far apart in time, have the same principle underlying them’ (J. 3 p. 7b ll. 3–4). It is interesting to note in passing that Dr. Hu Shih took this passage as evidence that Shyuntzzy believed in the immutability of species, translating it as follows: ‘The past and the present are the same. The species are not mutable: they are governed by the same principle, no matter how long they have lasted’. (*The Development of the Logical method in Ancient China*, Shanghai, 1922, p. 153; see also *Jonggwo Jershyueshyy Dahgang* 中國哲學史大綱 1919, pp. 311–12.) The text does not seem to warrant such an interpretation. All that is said is that if things are of the same kind, then irrespective of the position in time they may happen to occupy, the same principle underlies them all; it says nothing as to whether things can change from one species into another or not. If they do, then since they would have become things of a different kind it follows as a matter of course that the principle that used to underlie them before the change would no longer hold. For our present purpose this passage embodies the general principle of which the truth that all men being of the same kind are alike is but a special case.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit. J. 17 pp. 11a l. 7—11b l. 1; Legge, pp. 85–6.

<sup>3</sup> An objection may be raised here that even if *chih* is not used as a technical term in *Shyuntzzy*, it seems to be so used in *Mencius*, and this may, in some respects at least, be akin to the notion of

I hope I have made clear from the solutions offered in subsequent ages how the doctrines of Mencius and Shyuntzy have traditionally been interpreted. They are taken to be flatly contradictory to each other and also incompatible with the actual facts about human conduct, which is the manifestation of human nature. In the rest of this paper I shall attempt to show that this interpretation is too simple-minded. It rests essentially on the assumption that human nature was a thing which cannot be both good and bad at the same time. Questioning this, I shall attempt to show that it is not very helpful to look upon the doctrines of Mencius and Shyuntzy as mutually contradictory, even though they both apply to human beings universally, and that neither doctrine is incompatible with the actual facts of human conduct. It is more illuminating to consider the two from the point of view of disagreement over the nature of, or, if one prefers, the way of looking at, morality, which leads in turn to a difference in the method of moral education. I do not, of course, mean to say that there is any issue concerning morality which is not, at the same time, in some way an issue concerning human nature, but only that it is more illuminating to look at it from one point of view rather than from the other.

## II

Before examining the doctrine that human nature is good by looking at actual passages from *Mencius*, let us look at an interpretation of this theory by Chern Lii 陳澧, an eminent scholar of the 19th century (1810–1882). He writes :—

‘ When Mencius said that human nature is good, what he meant was only that in the nature of all men there is good, and not that the nature of every man is purely good. He says that all men have the heart <sup>1</sup> of commiseration, all men have the heart of shame, all men have the heart of respect, and all men have the heart of right and wrong ; that all men have the heart of the parent ; that not only the wise have such hearts but that everyone has them ; that if

*chih* of the Song philosophers. Such an objection would, of course, be based solely on *Mencius*, IIA. 2 (J. 3 pp. 4 ff. ; Legge pp. 185 ff.), where the famous *haw ran jy chih* 浩然之氣 occurs. As it would be too long to go into details concerning the interpretation of the *haw ran jy chih*, my answer is briefly this. I am aware that there have been attempts to read metaphysical implications into this phrase of Mencius, but I am inclined to think that the purpose of the whole passage was merely to give a description of what it feels like to be a morally cultivated man so as to provide a criterion for any one who would like to test his own progress in the acquiring of such cultivation. In its use here *chih* would have very much its ordinary meaning of ‘ breath ’, something which, in Mencius’ own words, ‘ fills the body ’. As a man who is angry is puffed up with *chih*, so a man of moral cultivation who has right on his side is filled with the *haw ran jy chih*. By using the word *chih* for both, Mencius draws our attention to the resemblance while, by adding the epithet *haw ran*, he is drawing our attention to the difference. In being filled with righteous indignation, we are not really puffed up with breath as in the case of anger. Nevertheless, there is something akin between the two such as to make this way of speaking illuminating in our search for some subjective sign which can enable us to recognize our success in moral cultivation.

<sup>1</sup> In this paper I have sometimes rendered the word *shin* 心 as ‘ heart ’, because, though it is perhaps more natural to render it as ‘ mind ’, in some contexts ‘ mind ’ would be misleading. As the word ‘ heart ’ in English can be used to denote the seat of the emotions, it is an extension rather than a violation of its usage to use it to denote other aspects of the mind.

any man were to see, all of a sudden, a child about to fall into a well, he would have a feeling of apprehension and pity; that all men have the heart that cannot bear the suffering of others; that there are things a man cannot bear and things he would not do. Mencius could not have said more clearly than this that in all men there is good. Again, he said that it cannot be the case that in man there is no feeling for morality; that whoever has not the heart of commiseration is not human, whoever has not the heart of shame is not human, whoever has not the heart of keeping oneself back in order to make way for others is not human, and whoever has not the heart of right and wrong is not human. He could not have said more clearly than this that there is no man who is completely devoid of good. Gong Dutzyy said: "Some say that there are men who by nature are not good; that is why with Yau as ruler there was Shianq". Mencius' reply was: "If one follows one's natural inclinations one can be good. This is what I mean by human nature being good". In this Mencius was trying to make use of Gong Dutzyy's view that there are those born not good in order to clear up his perplexity, viz. by saying that although such people have a nature which is not good, they are still not completely devoid of good. How can this be shown to be so? By the fact that their inclinations are capable of being good we know that they are not by nature completely devoid of good, and that is what Mencius meant by saying that human nature is good. For instance, Shianq's nature was indeed bad, yet when he saw Shuenn he felt ashamed; this means that his inclinations can be good, that even in his nature there is good. This is what Mencius meant by saying that human nature is good. If he had in mind the nature of Yau, how could he have said merely that it was possible for it to be good? For the nature of the sage is purely good, that of the ordinary man has some good, while even that of the bad man is not purely bad. By human nature being good is meant this, and by no man being completely devoid of good is also meant this.<sup>1</sup>

I have quoted this passage at length because I think it is interesting to examine an interpretation which, in point of time, is some 2,000 years later than the Hann scholars we have looked at, and yet is, in content, not so very much different. There are points of difference, of course, and we can say they are improvements. Instead of the three grades of men, we have now only two. The sage being purely good is still set apart from the rest of humanity, but the wicked is no longer looked upon as purely bad and so incorrigible, but is regarded as belonging to the same class as the ordinary man who is not purely good either. Further, and this is certainly a great step forward, Mencius' theory is no longer taken as true only of the sage. On the contrary, as it is taken to mean simply that there is good in man, it is precisely as applied to the sage that it is false by implication, for to say that there is good in man is to imply that there is also bad in him, but the sage is said to be purely good. To the ordinary man, this applies without qualifications.

<sup>1</sup> *Dongshwu-Dwushujih* 東塾讀書記, SBBY ed. J. 3 pp. 1a-1b.

There are, however, two difficulties in this interpretation. Firstly, to consider the sage as above the application of the theory is contrary to the explicit statement of Mencius, who, as we have seen, says that the sage is the same as anybody else. Secondly, there is a difficulty in interpreting the statement that human nature is good as simply meaning that in all men (apart from the sages), there is good and not that all men are completely good. For, as we have seen, to say that there is good in all men is to say that there is also bad in all men, as is evident from the inclusion of the bad man. Now if human nature is, indeed, a mixture of good and bad, and this is taken as ground for saying that human nature is good, then there is no reason why on the same ground we should not say human nature is bad. We must do better than this to defend Mencius as reasonable in putting forth his doctrine. But these two difficulties arising out of Chern Lii's interpretation will prove to be instructive and will help us to see more clearly the conditions a successful interpretation must fulfil.

It is time to turn to Mencius. Let us examine a passage which has been partially quoted by Chern Lii in his exposition.

'Mencius said: "Men all have the heart that cannot bear the suffering of others. The Former Kings, because they had the heart that cannot bear the suffering of others, showed this in the way they governed the people. With such a heart practising such government, ruling the world was like rolling it on one's palm. This is what I mean by saying that all men have the heart that cannot bear the suffering of others. Now if any man were, all of a sudden, to see a little child about to fall into a well, he would experience the feeling of apprehension and pity, not for the sake of gaining the favour of its parents, nor the praise of his neighbours and friends, nor yet because he dislikes the reputation he would otherwise get of being callous. Judging from this, whoever has not the heart of commiseration is not human, whoever has not the heart of shame is not human, whoever has not the heart of keeping oneself back in order to make way for others is not human, and whoever has not the heart of right and wrong is not human. The heart of commiseration is the beginning<sup>1</sup> of humanity; the heart of shame is the beginning of righteousness; the heart of keeping oneself back in order to make way for others is the beginning of observing ritual; the heart of right and wrong is the beginning of wisdom. A man has these four beginnings as he has four limbs. To have these four beginnings and to say to oneself that one is incapable of being good is to do harm to oneself, and to say that one's prince is incapable of being good is to do harm to one's prince. If having these four beginnings in oneself one knows to extend them, it is as if a fire is beginning to blaze or a spring beginning to flow through. If one is able to extend them, one has all that is required to maintain peace within the four seas. If one does not extend them, one will be incapable even of serving one's parents".'

Since this passage contains, I think, practically the whole of Mencius'

<sup>1</sup> The word here translated as 'beginning' is *duan* 端, which means literally a new shoot, a sprout, and therefore something which needs nurture before it can develop fully into a plant.

<sup>2</sup> *Mencius* IIA. 6, J. 3 pp. 14b-16a; Legge pp. 201-4.

doctrine of human nature, it is worth while examining it in some detail. The four beginnings have traditionally been taken as if they were parallel and co-ordinate factors. This I believe to be an error, and one that is at least in part responsible for the failure to understand Mencius.

First of all there is the *shyh fei jy shin* 是非之心, which I have rendered as 'the heart of right and wrong'. *Shyh fei* has two senses: (a) right and wrong, and (b) approval of the right and disapproval of the wrong. Hence in saying that every man has *shyh fei jy shin*, Mencius is making the double point that (a) all men are able, by nature, to distinguish right (*shyh*) from wrong (*fei*), and (b) they not only draw the distinction but also approve of (*shyh*) the right and disapprove of (*fei*) the wrong. In other words, the distinction between right and wrong is not purely a theoretical one, for once the distinction is made one also feels the right ought to be done and the wrong ought not to be done.

Then there is the heart of shame or, in more idiomatic English, the sense of shame. One feels ashamed when one has done the wrong, and not the right, thing. Mencius places great emphasis on the importance of shame. He says, 'A man must not be devoid of shame',<sup>1</sup> and again, 'Important indeed is shame to man'.<sup>2</sup>

So far we see that every man is equipped with the ability to distinguish right from wrong, to feel he ought to do the right and to feel ashamed if he does not do it. Now assuming that we often do what is wrong, so long as we also sometimes do the right thing, we can see that there is a sense in which we can say that human nature is good. This is because even in cases where we have in fact done wrong, we know that we have done wrong and feel ashamed of it, while in cases where we have done right, we know we have done right and approve of ourselves for what we have done. This disposes of the major objection which was raised in connexion with Chern Lii's interpretation. The objection was that if we sometimes do good and sometimes do bad or, in Chern Lii's terminology, if we are neither purely good nor purely bad, how was Mencius justified in saying that human nature is good rather than bad? Now we see that Mencius' justification does not at all lie in the actual way in which human beings behave, but in the fact that they possess a sense of morality and a sense of shame. Since these have to do with what men *ought to do*, an assertion which is based on this cannot be invalidated by evidence as to what men *in fact do*, unless it could be shown that human beings can never do what is right, for in that case it would be odd to say that human nature is good. This also solves the difficulty about the sages. We may admit, for argument's sake, that a sage is one who never *in fact* does anything wrong. This would still leave the possibility open that he *can* do wrong. In that case we can treat him in the same way as an ordinary man, the only difference between him and the ordinary man being that the latter in fact often does wrong, and this, as we have seen, does not touch Mencius' theory.

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., VIIA. 6, J. 13 p. 2b l. 8; Legge p. 451.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., VIIA. 7, J. 13 p. 3a l. 3; Legge pp. 451-2.

I have admitted that it would be awkward for Mencius' theory if man, as a matter of fact, can never do the right thing. Fortunately this has been taken care of by Mencius in the above passage. He shows there that there are tendencies in a man's nature which can furnish him with the motive force for doing good. Both 'the heart of commiseration' and 'the heart of keeping oneself back in order to make way for others' are such tendencies. The first renders us capable of feeling sympathy towards the misery of others and of desiring to do something about it. The second renders us capable of putting others first. In situations where there is any conflict of interest between ourself and others, this will prompt us to be considerate towards them.

Mencius ought, of course, to show that by nature man in fact possesses these four beginnings. Unfortunately he has done so only in the case of the heart of commiseration. Let us look at this part carefully. Note that he says, 'Now if any man were, *all of a sudden*, to see a little child about to fall into a well . . .' The phrase 'all of a sudden' was, I think, put in deliberately and has great significance in connexion with the point under discussion. It shows that the reaction is instantaneous and therefore not the result of deliberation but entirely spontaneous. Now in one sense of the word 'natural', our spontaneous reactions are natural, while our reactions after due deliberation are not. We often say, for instance, that a man is liable to show his true nature in moments when he is caught off his guard. On this criterion, if a man unexpectedly sees a child about to fall into a well and feels apprehension and pity, this shows that to feel in this way in such situations must be part of his nature. There is a further purpose in inserting the phrase 'all of a sudden'. Mencius was anxious to show that the feeling was not due to self-interest, because one can only act out of self-interest after deliberation or calculation. Here there is no time for such deliberation. Moreover, Mencius says that he would not be feeling pity for the sake of gaining the favour of the parents of the child or of winning the praise of his neighbours and friends, or even to avoid the name of callousness which he might otherwise incur. If his feeling had any ulterior motives at all, these would be the most likely ones, so, if he was not prompted by any of these motives, one may take it that his feeling was genuinely spontaneous.

Mencius' purpose was only to show that men have natural motives to do good; he did not want to exaggerate the strength of such motives. It is worth noticing that Mencius does not say that this feeling of apprehension and pity would necessarily lead to any action at all. This serves to show that this feeling is only literally a 'beginning', which needs cultivation before it can become a strong motive force. It also serves to show that in our nature we may be corrupt to the extent of doing nothing about the child, and yet not so corrupt as to feel nothing.

Not only did Mencius admit that men, more often than not, do the wrong thing, but he offered an explanation for it. This, according to him, is due to the corrupting influence of environment.

'In good years the young people are mostly slack; in hard years they are

mostly violent. It is not that heaven has thus endowed them differently, but that what ensnares their hearts are what they are . . .'<sup>1</sup> That human nature can be corrupted by environment into doing wrong in no way conflicts with Mencius' view, for even when a man does wrong in his corrupted state, he would still know that what he is doing is wrong and feel ashamed of himself. Even the wicked brother of Shuenn was ashamed when, after making what he thought was a successful attempt on Shuenn's life, he saw Shuenn coming into the room.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, such an account of the corruption of human nature shows than Mencius had his eyes firmly on the facts of human behaviour.

It will be helpful to our understanding of Mencius' theory if we ask the question: 'Under what circumstances would we be entitled to say, in the same sense in which Mencius says that human nature is good, that human nature is bad?' We have seen that it would not do just to point out that human beings do very often act contrary to their duties. Man would need to approve of the wrong as such and feel ashamed of doing the right as such. But this would be a contradiction in terms, for when we approve of anything we do so because it is right, and when we disapprove of anything we do so because it is wrong, and so if we try to say that we approve of a thing because it is wrong, we feel that either it is a contradiction in terms or that 'wrong' really does not mean wrong but right. One cannot really have an immoral morality. The true contrast to morality is the lack of it. That is to say, the opposite to Mencius' view that human nature is good is not the apparent contradictory view that human nature is bad but the view that human nature is a-moral. Men would, then, be in a state in which he would not draw the distinction between right and wrong and, therefore, would feel no approval or disapproval. Once we put the matter in this way, we see that the doctrine that human nature is good amounts to no more than that human beings are moral agents, because for a man to be a moral agent is simply for him to be capable of distinguishing right from wrong, to approve of right and disapprove of wrong, and to be able to choose to do the right. Put in this way, it can at once be seen that Mencius' theory was not in conflict with the facts of human behaviour at all.

It may be felt that if that is all the contribution made by Mencius to moral philosophy, it is not much. We must, however, realize that though it may not seem very much if we consider Mencius as a contemporary philosopher, it certainly marked a great advance in his time. We must remember that Mencius was combating views current at his time, according to which human nature consists only of desires, morality is decreed by heaven (*tien ming* 天命) and, this being external, it is not at all certain whether men can be moral or not. Mencius' theory serves to break down the barrier between *ming* and *shing*, and insists that morality is not something 'that comes from outside to adorn me, but something that I had originally'.<sup>3</sup> He quotes with approval from the *Book of Poetry* :—

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., VIA. 7, J. 11 p. 7a ll. 2-4; Legge p. 404.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., VA. 2, J. 9 pp. 3b-4a; Legge p. 347.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., VIA. 6, J. 11 p. 6a l. 7; Legge p. 403.

‘Heaven produced the common people;  
And when Heaven produces anything it also provides it with a standard,  
The common people, if they hold firm to the norm,  
Will be attracted to the beautiful virtues.’

He goes on to quote Confucius as saying ‘Whoever wrote this poem must have had knowledge of the *daw*’.<sup>1</sup> Mencius quotes this poem with such approval because it lends support to his ‘internalization’ of morals, which may be described as the substituting of ‘self-legislation’ for ‘external divine command’.<sup>2</sup> It is not surprising that Mencius could cite support for his theory from the Jou poems, as it is really a working out of a view of morals, the germ of which could be found in the thought of the early Jou rulers as embodied in parts of the *Book of History* (*Shu Jing*) and the *Book of Poetry* (*Shy Jing*). This was certainly no mean achievement.<sup>3</sup>

### III

We can best begin our account of Shyuntzzy’s doctrine of human nature by his definition of it.

‘Human nature is what is accomplished by heaven. It is something which cannot be learned and to which one cannot apply oneself . . . That in man which cannot be learned and to which he cannot apply himself is called his nature.’<sup>4</sup>

In defining human nature thus, the purpose is to contrast it with human artifice (*wey* 偽)<sup>5</sup> which, later in the same passage, Shyuntzzy defines

<sup>1</sup> Loc. cit., J. 11 p. 6b ll. 4–7. The quotation from the *Book of Poetry* is from *Jeng Min* 蒸民 in the *Dah Yea* 大雅.

<sup>2</sup> This naturally reminds one of Bishop Butler’s sermon on the text ‘For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves’. Indeed the resemblance between Mencius’ moral philosophy and that of Butler was pointed out long ago by Legge (see Introduction to *Chinese Classics* vol. ii). I wish, however, to draw attention to the difference between them. Butler, as has often been pointed out, had a hankering after the view that enlightened self-interest and conscience, in the last resort, really point the same way. But Mencius was most uncompromising in his attitude towards self-interest (*lih* 利), as can be seen from, for instance, VIIA. 25, where he says, ‘One who gets up with the crowing of the cock and untiringly works for goodness is the same sort of man as Shuenn; one who gets up with the crowing of the cock and untiringly works for profit (*lih*) is of the same sort as Jyr. If you want to know the difference between Shuenn and Jyr, it is nothing else than this: it is the difference between profit and goodness’ (J 13 pp. 10b l. 8—11a l. 2; Legge p. 464).

<sup>3</sup> I cannot here go into the problem of the relation between *ming* and *shing*, interesting though it is. For treatment of the history of both notions and their relation I refer the reader to the book by Fuh Synian mentioned on p. 541, n. 1.

<sup>4</sup> ‘凡性者天之就也不可學不可事 . . . 不可學不可事而在人者謂之性’, *Shyuntzzy*, ch. 23, *SBTK* ed. J. 17 pp. 2b–3a; Legge p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> The word *wey* as used in *Shyuntzzy* is free from the pejorative sense of ‘hypocritical’. It is possible that the word originally used by Shyuntzzy was simply *wei* 爲 ‘to do’. At any rate, *wey* is used in *Shyuntzzy* as a technical term in opposition to *shing* (human nature). It covers both the human activities of doing something and making something, e.g. moral behaviour and the making of articles by a craftsman. Since there is no English word which covers the same range of meaning, I have chosen arbitrarily the term ‘human artifice’, which should therefore be understood in the sense just described.

as 'That in man of which he can become capable through learning and which he can perfect through application is called human artifice.'<sup>1</sup> Now this definition of human nature is a formal one. It only gives us a criterion for deciding, when faced with any human capacity, whether it falls under human nature or human artifice, given that we know whether this capacity can be learned or not and whether it can be improved through application or not. It is the sort of definition which may continue to hold even if human nature were to change, so long as there are still certain capacities which can be learned and others that cannot be. So this definition does not tell us what exactly human nature is, and for it to be informative on this point it is essential that Shyuntzzy should further specify what it is that cannot be learned or improved through application. This we find in his chapter on Rectification of Names :—

'Human nature is that which is accomplished by heaven ; emotions (*ching* 情) are the content of human nature, desires are emotions manifesting themselves as responses.'<sup>2</sup>

The substance or content of human nature is the emotions and these are enumerated as 'love, hate, pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy'.<sup>3</sup> They are not important in themselves, but only in so far as they manifest themselves as responses to outside things and thus become desires, which are important for our present purpose, as they lead to action, and it is only when there is action that the question of human nature being good or evil arises.

'Man has desires from birth, and when he desires a thing which he has not got, he necessarily seeks it.'<sup>4</sup>

There is no harm in our desires leading us to seek for what we have not got. But Shyuntzzy brings in two other factors which change the complexion of the situation. Firstly :—

'Men cannot live without society.'<sup>5</sup>

This is because :—

'The fruits of the hundred crafts contribute to the sustenance of one man whose capacities cannot be directed towards all the crafts and who cannot attend to all tasks, with the result that if he cuts himself off from society, he would find himself in an impossible position.'<sup>6</sup>

Herein lies our superiority to animals,<sup>7</sup> but it is also responsible for the difficulty man finds himself in. Man cannot live without others ; but it is not easy for him to live with them either. Secondly :—

<sup>1</sup> '可學而能可事而成之在人者謂之偽', loc. cit., p. 3a ll. 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., ch. 22, J. 16 p. 14b ll. 3-4. There are two further translations of this chapter which may be consulted : (a) by Prof. J. J. L. Duyvendak, *T'oung Pao* vol. xxiii (1924) pp. 221-254, (b) by Prof. Y. P. Mei, *Philosophy East and West* vol. i no. 2, July, 1951, pp. 51-66. Both contain the Chinese text.

<sup>3</sup> Loc. cit., p. 1b ll. 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., ch. 19 J. 13 p. 1a ll. 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., ch. 9, J. 5 p. 13a l. 8 ; also ch. 10, J. 6 p. 5a l. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., ch. 10, J. 6 p. 2a ll. 2-6.

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., ch. 9, J. 5 pp. 12b-13a.

'Desires and aversions are for the same things. Desires are many while things are few. This scarcity necessarily leads to strife.'<sup>1</sup>

We can now see the whole argument. Men cannot but live in society, but they have desires for the same things. The number of things available is limited and is not enough to satisfy all desires if everyone indulges his desires to the full. The result is strife,<sup>2</sup> and 'strife is disastrous'.<sup>3</sup> To say that strife is disastrous (*huoh* 禍) is Shyuntzy's way of saying that strife is bad. Since the content of human nature is desire, and desire given free rein leads necessarily to strife which is bad, we can see why Shyuntzy says that human nature is bad.

In Shyuntzy's time there was current a doctrine which solved the problem we are now concerned with by advocating either (a) the complete elimination of desires, or (b) the cutting down of the number of desires.<sup>4</sup> This, of course, goes directly against the teaching of Shyuntzy, according to which desires, since we are endowed with them by heaven, are beyond our power to change or influence. Shyuntzy is very positive in his rejection of such a view.

'Whoever in talking about order says we must first rid ourselves of our desires is one who does not know at all how to guide his desires, and so is embarrassed by his desires. Whoever in talking about order says we must first cut down the number of desires is one who does not know how to control his desires and so is embarrassed by having too many desires. Having desires is different in kind from having no desires—the difference between the living and the dead, not the difference between orderly and disorderly states of the same kind of thing. Having many desires is different in kind from having few desires—the difference in the number of emotions, not the difference between orderly and disorderly states of the same kind of thing.'<sup>5</sup>

Here Shyuntzy points out that that which has desires is totally different in kind from that which has no desires, and they are contrasted as the living and the dead, or the animate and the inanimate. Similarly that which has many desires is totally different in kind from that which has few desires. To say that they are different in kind is to say that unless we can change the nature of the one, we cannot hope to transform it into the other, but by definition the nature of a thing is determined by heaven and cannot be changed by the doing of man. Hence it is idle to advocate either ridding ourselves totally of our desires or cutting down the number of desires, for to hope to be able to do this is to hope to transform ourselves into something other than men, which is impossible.

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., ch. 10, J. 6 pp. 1b l. 8—2a l. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Although Shyuntzy uses only the argument that the number of things fall short of that which would satisfy all the desires of all men to the full, he need not have relied completely on this. Even were there enough things to go round, there may still be strife when different people desire one and the same thing. For the solution of this sort of conflict, there need to be rules to establish the precedence of claims.

<sup>3</sup> Loc. cit., J. 6 p. 2a l. 7.

<sup>4</sup> The cutting down of the number of desires is put forth in *Mencius* VII B. 35 (J. 14 pp. 15a-b; Legge, p. 497), as the best means for nourishing the mind.

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., ch. 22, J. 16 p. 13a l. 5—p. 13b l. 3.

Further, since having desires and having no desires belong to different classes they cannot be the orderly and disorderly states of the same thing. That is, we cannot hold the view that for men to have no desires will give rise to order while for men to have desires will give rise to disorder, for men without desires would no longer be men. The mistake of the doctrine under examination lies, according to Shyuntzzy, precisely in this false belief that even after ridding themselves of their desires (or cutting down their desires) men would still be men.

Having rejected this solution, Shyuntzzy offers his own. This is based on the distinction between desiring something and seeking it.

‘Whether we desire something or not does not depend on whether that something is obtainable or not; but whether we seek what we desire depends on whether what is desired is possible (*kee* 可) <sup>1</sup> or not. Desires do not depend on the obtainability or otherwise of their objects because desires are what we are given by heaven; seeking depends on whether we think the object possible or not because seeking depends on the mind.<sup>2</sup> When what is originally the same in all of us, viz. the desires given us by heaven, is controlled by the mind which differs greatly in different people, it is natural that what results is not much like what we originally got from heaven.’ <sup>3</sup>

We are all given by heaven the same desires which it is beyond our power to change. What is within our control is whether we proceed to seek the objects of our desires. If the mind realizes that the securing of an object is impossible (or impermissible), then we stop seeking the object. To illustrate this, Shyuntzzy points to cases where a man’s action falls short of his desire or goes beyond his desire. In such cases, says Shyuntzzy, it is the mind which keeps the man back or urges him on. An example of the former would be a man who sacrifices his life, because holding on to life would be impermissible. As all men love life more than anything else, the action of a man who sacrifices his life, Shyuntzzy argues, falls short of the strength of his desire for life which would be more than enough to carry him through any action that may be necessary to escape death.

But, it may be asked, if, as a result of the difference between our minds, some of us may consider the securing of any given object as possible (or permissible) and so pursue it, while others consider the same thing impossible (or impermissible) and so desist from pursuing it, is that not evidence that we have been given different desires by heaven? It is to forestall this that Shyuntzzy makes

<sup>1</sup> The word *kee* means (1) possible, and (2) morally permissible. The argument here is that we stop seeking a thing once we realize that it is *impossible* (i.e. unattainable). But then it is assumed that what has been established is that we stop seeking a thing once we realize that it is *impermissible*. This sliding from something which is at least plausible to something which is palpably false is, of course, unacceptable. Fortunately this defect in the argument is not of very great importance to our present purpose. It is enough that we do *sometimes* stop seeking a thing once we realize that it is morally impermissible though we may continue to desire it.

<sup>2</sup> In some versions there are nine extra characters here: 天性有欲心爲之制節. ‘There are desires by nature, but the mind exercises control over them’. See Kubo Ai (Chikusui) 久保愛 (筑水), *Junshi Zōchū* 荀子增注, Kan 16 p. 13b.

<sup>3</sup> Loc. cit., J. 16 p. 13b ll. 4–8.

the point that the desires given us by heaven were originally the same, and that it is only because our minds exhibit such diversity that the final result, viz. our desires as modified by the control of our minds, bears so little resemblance to our original desires. At any rate the main point Shyuntzyy wants to establish is that in spite of our desires, our minds have a good degree of control over what we actually do.

Now we are in a position to understand a further definition of human artifice given by Shyuntzyy :—

‘When emotions are what they are, the choosing between them by the mind is called reflection. When the mind reflects and puts our capacities to use, this is called human artifice. What is accomplished through the accumulation of reflection and the practice in the exercise of our capacities is called human artifice.’<sup>1</sup>

This definition completes the description of the marks which distinguish human artifice from human nature. Not only is what can be learned and improved upon by application human artifice, but also what is the result of reflection by the mind. The importance of this will be seen when we come to discuss the role played by the sages in Shyuntzyy’s doctrine. The two parts of the definition are designed to bring out the point that there are two distinct ways in which the mind can modify our action. First it can think out the course of action for a particular occasion, and make use of our original capacities for the carrying out of the planned course of action. Secondly, it can accumulate reflections and, more important, it can habituate our capacities to carrying out the planned actions even though these may be contrary to the natural use of these capacities.

Now, it being established that the mind has the ability to control our actions, it is easy to see that the next task is to show that whether we have order or disorder (in ourselves or in society) will depend on the principle underlying the mind’s decision whether or in which way to act. If that principle is reasonable then we will have order ; if not, disorder.

‘If what the mind permits (*kee* 可) is reasonable, even if desires are numerous, what harm is this to order ? . . . If what the mind permits is not reasonable, then even if desires are few, what is there to prevent disorder ? This is why order and disorder depend on what the mind considers permissible (*kee*) and have nothing to do with what our emotions desire.’<sup>2</sup>

With this, Shyuntzyy seems to have contradicted his own main thesis that desires are responsible for strife and disorder, which is his ground for saying that human nature is evil. But he can be defended against the charge of self-contradiction. When he says that desires lead to strife and disorder, what he means is that desires as they originally are will, if unchecked, lead naturally to strife and disorder. What desire as controlled by the mind leads to is not the same as what desire in its original state would naturally lead to.

<sup>1</sup> ‘情然而心爲之擇謂之慮心慮而能爲之動謂之僞慮積能習焉而後成謂之僞’, loc. cit., J. 16 pp. 1b l. 8—2a l. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Loc. cit., J. 16 pp. 14a ll. 5–6, l. 8—14b l. 2.

Now this principle which, if it underlies the mind's decisions, would lead to order is, of course, morality. Morality, Shyuntzyy insists, was an invention of the sages :—

‘ Human nature is what is accomplished by heaven. It is something which cannot be learned and to which one cannot apply oneself. Morality is what has been produced by the sages. It is that of which a man is capable through learning and which he perfects through application.’<sup>1</sup>

Morality consists in the creating of social distinctions, which carry with them the delimitation of the extent to which it is permissible for members of each social class to indulge their desires. This Shyuntzyy calls *fen(n)* (分). As we have seen, strife was attributed to living in society without such delimitation. ‘ Not to have social distinctions (*fen*) is the greatest evil to man ; to have social distinctions is the greatest benefit to man.’<sup>2</sup> Again, ‘ When there is strife, there is disorder, and when there is disorder, the position would be impossible. The Former Kings disliked disorder. Hence they made morality for the sake of assigning people to their social classes (*fen*)’.<sup>3</sup>

The cure for strife and disorder is to lay down rules concerning the position and status of individuals and classes in society. This would define what everyone is entitled to and the precedence of different claimants. This is Shyuntzyy's conception of morality, which is to enable people to reap the benefit of living in society while avoiding the accompanying evils.

In inventing morality the sages had to do more than merely see that this is a solution to the problem of how to reconcile the fact that individuals possess desires with the fact that they have to live in society. They had also to be able to see that what is required of the ordinary man is comprehensible to him, and that there is a genuine possibility of so disciplining man that he will behave in accordance with the prescriptions of morality as if it were second nature to him. And when the ordinary man understands what is required of him, and succeeds in cultivating the habit of being moral, then he is no different from a sage in his behaviour.

‘ What does it mean to say that ordinary men can become a Yeu ? Answer : What makes a Yeu a Yeu is his being moral and correct. Now morality and norms have in them that which makes them intelligible and practicable. And ordinary men are all so constituted that they are able to understand morality and norms and are all capable of putting them into practice. It is obvious then that an ordinary man can become a Yeu. Now, if you consider morality and norms as beyond the possibility of understanding and practice, then even Yeu could not have understood them and practised them. On the other hand, if the

<sup>1</sup> The first half of this quotation has already appeared on p. 551, where the original Chinese text is given in n. 4. The Chinese text then goes on as follows: 禮義者聖人之所生也人之所學而能所事而成者也. Op. cit., ch. 23, J. 17 p. 2b ll. 6-8; Legge, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., ch. 10, J. 6 pp. 5a l. 8—5b l. 1. Read ‘ *dah lih* 大利 ’ for ‘ *been lih* 本利 ’.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., ch. 9, J. 5 pp. 3b l. 8—4a l. 1.

man in the street has not the capacity to understand morality and the norms nor the capacity to practise them, then he would not be able to understand, when in the family, the right relation between father and son or, when abroad, the correct relation between ruler and subordinate. Now that is not so ; ordinary people are all able to understand, when in the family, the right relation between father and son and, when abroad, the correct relation between ruler and subordinate. It is obvious then that the man in the street has the capacity both to understand and to practise them. Now if the man in the street, with his capacity both to understand and to practise morality and norms, bases himself on the intelligibility and practicability of morality and the norms,<sup>1</sup> then it is obvious that he can become a Yeu. And if the man in the street applies himself to learning, and sets his whole heart on it, reflects upon it and examines it carefully, then after a long period of ceaselessly accumulating goodness, he will be in communion with the gods and form a triad with heaven and earth. That is why the position of the sage is attained by the accumulation of human effort.’<sup>2</sup>

The common man, if he perseveres in the accumulation of morality (i.e. the gradual acquisition of the habit of behaving morally) will become a sage. It is worth noting in passing that even then he would not really be the equal of the ancient sage kings, for he has only succeeded in becoming a sage after the sage kings had invented morality. Shyuntzy does not say, and the tenor of his whole teaching is against the view, that any and everybody who thinks hard enough will be able to invent morality.<sup>3</sup>

At this point the question naturally arises : If it is possible for every man to become a sage, why is it not, in fact, true that every man does become a sage ? To answer this, Shyuntzy draws the distinction between its being possible for anyone to become something and his actually succeeding in becoming it.

‘ Question : If the position of the sage is attained by accumulation, why is it not the case that all men are capable of this accumulation ? Answer : They are capable of it but cannot be made to do it. The small man is capable of becoming a gentleman but he refuses to become one ; the gentleman is capable of becoming a small man but refuses to become one. It is not impossible for small men and gentlemen to become each other ; yet they do not, in fact, become each other, because although they can do so they cannot be made to

<sup>1</sup> Read 可知可能之理 for 可知之理可能之具.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., ch. 23, J. 17 pp. 10b-11b ; Legge, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> In chapter 21 ‘*Jiee Bih* 解蔽’, however, in answer to the question, ‘ How does the mind get to know the Way (*daw* 道) ? ’ we are given what seems to be a general recipe for attaining knowledge of the *daw*, viz. emptying, unity and tranquillity (of the mind). This seems to dispense with the necessity of the sages as inventors of morality. As I have pointed out above (see p. 541, n. 1), the present text of *Shyuntzy* is a very heterogeneous collection, and it is rather to be expected that there should be inconsistent views in different parts of the work. In our present case, the theory of mind and knowledge as found in chapter 21 is Taoist in flavour rather than Confucianist. See Yang Yunru 楊筠如, *Shyuntzy Yanjiow* 荀子研究 (*Gwoshyue Sheau Tsongshu* 國學小叢書, Commercial Press, 1933) pp. 58-62.

do so. Hence it is the case that the man in the street can become a Yeu, but it is not necessarily the case that he will become a Yeu. Even if he does not succeed in becoming a Yeu, that does not interfere with his being capable of becoming a Yeu. The foot is capable of walking all round the world, but there is yet no foot which has succeeded in walking all round the world. It is not impossible for the craftsman, the farmer and the merchant to do one another's jobs, yet they do not in fact succeed in doing so. Judging from this, "capable of becoming" is not necessarily "successful in becoming"; and "not succeeding" does not interfere with "being capable of becoming". Hence, "succeeding and not succeeding" and "capable and not capable" are very far apart.<sup>1</sup>

We are now in a position to sum up Shyuntzyy's view of human nature. Human nature consists of emotions which are manifested as desires in response to outside things. Desires naturally lead to seeking the objects desired. Unfortunately man has to live in society, and the supply of goods is limited. Hence, if everyone were to give unchecked rein to his desires, there would not be enough things to go round. This would result in strife and disorder, which are evils. We would still be living in such a state had it not been for the sage kings who invented morality. This consists in assigning to everyone a position in society which defines all that he is entitled to. Rights to goods being prescribed (presumably with an eye on the available resources) there is harmony and order in place of strife and disorder. That morality is possible is because of three facts. Firstly, our minds have a certain amount of control over the seeking of the objects of our desires, though not over the desires themselves. Secondly, we are creatures capable of habituation. Once a habit is formed, it becomes second nature. This increases the control the mind has over our actions. Lastly, morality, once invented, is intelligible to the man in the street. Every man has within him the makings of a sage. That he does not always succeed in becoming one is because he does not exert himself. Thus Shyuntzyy not only makes room for, but actually accounts for, the fact that there are people who behave morally and people who behave immorally. Like Mencius, he does not fly in the face of facts about human behaviour. His thesis that human nature is evil is based solely on the view that an analysis of human nature, as he defines it, shows that, if something is not done to it, it leads inevitably to strife.

#### IV

We have seen that neither the doctrine of Mencius nor that of Shyuntzyy goes against the facts of human behaviour. Let us turn now to a comparison between these two doctrines. We have seen that it is unprofitable to take these two doctrines as being embodied in the two simple assertions, viz. that human nature is good, and that human nature is bad, and consider them as flatly contradicting each other. Rather we should look at the grounds for these doctrines. In the case of Mencius, the grounds are: (a) human beings all have a sense of right and wrong and a sense of shame, and (b) it is possible for human

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., ch. 23, J. 17 pp. 11b-12b; Legge p. 86.

beings to do the right thing, i.e. in the make-up of human nature there are various tendencies which can furnish the motive force for doing the right thing. In the case of Shyuntzyy, the grounds are: (a) morality is not part of human nature but the invention of the sages, (b) if human beings were to act in accordance with their original nature, this would lead to strife. It is obvious that Mencius and Shyuntzyy disagree on both these issues. The basis of disagreement in both cases lies in Shyuntzyy's distinction between human nature and human artifice. Let us, first of all, recall this distinction: human nature is that which is (1) made what it is by heaven, (2) cannot be learned, (3) cannot be improved through application and (4) is not the result of reflection by the mind; while human artifice is that which (1) is invented by the sages, (2) can be learned, (3) can be improved through application, and (4) is the result of reflection by the mind.

With this in mind, let us turn back to the two points at issue between Mencius and Shyuntzyy. Let us take the second first. According to Shyuntzyy, human nature consists of desires which, if unchecked, lead to strife. He is implicitly denying that there are desires which are not of this kind, desires which would lead to harmony rather than to strife. Mencius, on the other hand, believes that in the original nature of man there are tendencies which would prompt him to act in a moral way. The contrast between Mencius and Shyuntzyy comes out most clearly in a passage in which Mencius also states this point in terms of what one has to learn before being able to know or do it and what need not be learned.

‘That which a man knows without having to reflect is what he really knows; that which he is able to do without having to learn it is what he really knows how to do.’<sup>1</sup> There are no young children who do not know to love their parents,

<sup>1</sup> The word I have here rendered as ‘really’ is *liang* 良. A word of explanation may not be out of place, as, since the Song philosophers, the phrase *liangjy* 良知 and *liangneng* 良能 have been taken to mean ‘original morally good knowledge’ and ‘original morally good capacities’. Ju Shi, for instance, says in his commentary, ‘By “*liang*” is meant “originally good”’ (*Mengtzzy Jyijuh* 孟子集注, SBBY ed. J. 15 p. 4b ll. 6–7). By the time of Wang Yang-Ming 王陽明, this interpretation was so firmly established that *liangjy* *liangneng*, in the sense of the originally good knowledge and capacities, became the corner-stone of his whole philosophy. But there seems to be no good grounds for this interpretation. The normal adjective for ‘morally good’ is *shann* 善. Apart from twice being used as a personal name, *liang* occurs only twelve times in *Mencius*, of which seven times are in the combination *liangren* 良人, which approximates very closely to the English phrase ‘good man’ in its idiomatic meaning of ‘husband’. This has nothing to do with the use of the word under discussion. Of the other five occurrences, two seem to mean not ‘morally good’ but ‘good of its kind’: (1) IIIB. 1 天下之良工也, ‘The best charioteer (lit. the best craftsman) under heaven’ (J. 6 p. 2a ll. 3–4; Legge p. 263); (2) VIB. 9 今之所謂良臣古之所謂民賊也, ‘What is to-day called a good minister would in ancient times have been called a pest to the people’ (J. 12 p. 12b l. 3; Legge p. 440). In VIA. 17 非良貴也 (J. 11 p. 16a l. 4; Legge, p. 420) decidedly means ‘not truly (genuinely, really) noble’, while in IVA. 15 we have 存乎人者莫良於眸子 ‘Of what is in man there is nothing more genuine (i.e. incapable of deceit) than his eyes’ (J. 7 p. 11b l. 6; Legge p. 306). Lastly in VIA. 8 we have 其所以放其良心者亦猶斧斤之於木也 ‘His letting go of his true (original) heart is like what is done to the wood by axes and bills’ (J. 11 p. 9a l. 6; Legge pp. 407–8). These last three passages point to the use of the

and who when they grow up do not know to respect their elder brothers. To love one's parents is *ren* 仁; to respect one's elder brothers is *yih* 義.<sup>1</sup>

Here then we have an irreconcilable difference between the two views. But the issue is not quite so clear-cut as regards the other point of difference, for in this statement of what a man knows without reflection and can do without having to learn, Mencius has only named *ren* and *yih* which, we may remember, answer to only two of the four beginnings man is said to have, viz. the heart that cannot bear the suffering of others and the heart of keeping oneself back in order to make way for others. No mention is made of the other two of the four beginnings, viz. the heart of right and wrong and the heart of shame.<sup>2</sup> One suspects that Mencius was aware of the difficulty if he included the other two. It may not be self-evident that children all naturally love their parents and respect their elder brothers, but it can still be said to be plausible. But it is not even plausible to say that young children are naturally able to distinguish between right and wrong and have a sense of shame. To be fair to Mencius, neither is it obvious that morality is an invention of the sages as Shyuntzyy would have it.

The inconclusiveness on both sides is due mainly to the intrinsic difficulty of the issue before us. We are in reality faced with the unenviable task of deciding whether something is learned or not, which is all the more difficult since the character in question is one which does not seem to manifest itself until a certain stage in the development of the human being. Babies do not show a sense of morality. On this point probably both philosophers agree. But as the child grows older, he gradually shows signs of being able to draw moral distinctions and capable of genuinely moral behaviour, as against behaviour which is prompted solely by love for his parents. We can interpret this fact in two ways. We can, of course, say that the child has learned morality as he has learned so many other things, e.g. speech. On the other hand, we can also say that although he does not show any awareness of morality until he is some years old, morality is really part of his initial make-up, but that the child must reach a certain maturity of mind and be given the right environment and opportunity before his moral consciousness will manifest itself. In this respect moral behaviour is rather like sexual behaviour. Although it is part of original human nature, it does not manifest itself at birth.<sup>3</sup> We have here two

word *liang* as meaning 'truly, genuinely, really'. I have therefore followed Peir Shyuehae 裴學海 in extending this interpretation to the present passage. (See *Mengtzzy Jenqyih Buujeng* 孟子正義補正, in *Gwoshyue Luenntsong* 國學論叢 vol. ii no. 2, pp. 188-9, Tsing Hua University, 1930). The gloss given by Jaw Chyi 趙岐 in his commentary is *shenn* 甚 (very, greatly), which would give an interpretation of *liangjy* and *liangneng* as 'know well (best)' and 'to be well (best) able to do', which does not differ materially from the present one.

<sup>1</sup> *Mencius* VIIA. 15, J. 13 pp. 6a-6b; Legge p. 456.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 547.

<sup>3</sup> Mencius did not compare moral behaviour with sexual behaviour, but I have chosen it as an illustration because, when Gawtzzy said, 'Sex and eating are human nature', Mencius did not dispute the statement (VIA. 4, J. 11 p. 3a; Legge p. 397), for his view was not that sex and eating are not human nature, but that human nature is not merely sex and eating. As he accepted

ways of looking at morality in relation to human nature. To put it in another way, we are not as sure of the nature of our moral consciousness as we are of the nature of speech and sex. That is why we find it illuminating to look upon morality as similar to one or the other of these two types of human capacities. If morality is really like speech, it is acquired, but if it is really like sex, it is part of original human nature. If we can decide to adopt either of these ways of looking at morality, we seem to have a clearer conception of the nature of morality, because we are enabled by our choice to arrive at further conclusions about morality simply by pushing our analogy further. If in so doing we are only making clear to ourselves the nature of morality, it may seem immaterial which we choose. But unfortunately in looking upon morality as similar to either we are doing something more. The clarification of the nature of morality carries with it also a decision as to its significance, because it seems natural to feel that morality, if it is acquired, does not possess the same significance as it would if it were part of original human nature.<sup>1</sup>

What is at stake appears to be the nature of morality rather than the nature of man. This point can also be brought out by looking into a weakness in Shyuntzzy's argument. Given that the mind is part of human nature, it is inevitable that someone or other (a sage in Shyuntzzy's terminology) will sooner or later think out a solution which will enable man to escape from the awkward situation he finds himself in as a result of his desires, and on Shyuntzzy's showing there is one, and only one, possible solution, viz. morality. There is no reason why we should not extend the name human nature to cover the capacity of invention possessed by the mind which is part of it. Shyuntzzy's refusal to grant this is reminiscent of the arguments put forth by pious Christians when the motor car was first invented that if we were meant by God to travel on wheels we would have been born with them. There is no reason why God should not have given us a mind and left us to do all our inventing, as there is no reason why the capacity of invention of the mind should not be classified as part of human nature. All this does, of course, nothing to remove the distinctions Shyuntzzy had drawn, it only shows that the distinctions are not the kind that would serve as basis for a theory of human nature. Yet looked

sex as part of original human nature, and sex in Mencius' day could only have been understood in the narrow sense of sex behaviour between man and woman, his view of sex must have been the common sense one assumed here. Needless to say, my point here has nothing whatever to do with modern psychological views about sex.

<sup>1</sup> Something of this kind can be seen in the contemporary issue between the Sociological school of moral theory which claims that morality has grown out of tribal custom and the Intuitionist school which holds that morality is part of the nature of things. Great importance seems to be attached to this issue. See, for instance, Sir David Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford, 1930) pp. 12-14. The reason why Ross feels so strongly about the matter seems to be found in the following quotation: 'But beliefs have the characteristics which bodies have not, of being true or false, of resting on knowledge or of being the product of wishes, hopes, and fears; and in so far as you can exhibit them as being the product of purely psychological and non-logical causes of this sort, while you leave intact the fact that many people hold such opinions *you remove their authority and their claim to be carried out in practice.*' (p. 13, my italics.)

at from the point of view of morality what Shyuntzyy says is important, for whether the capacity of invention of the mind is classified as part of human nature or not, it is important, as we have seen, to decide whether or not morality itself is an invention.

Corresponding to this difference as to the nature of morality is a difference between the roles Mencius and Shyuntzyy assigned to the sages or sage kings.

For Shyuntzyy, the sages or sage kings invented morality.<sup>1</sup> They created morality out of human nature, just as the potter created a vessel out of clay. Also just as the potter is able to do what he does, not *qua* man but *qua* potter, so the sage is able to do what he does, not *qua* man but *qua* sage.<sup>2</sup> The sage, with his special qualifications as a sage, was able to see a way out of the human predicament, and this is the morality he invented. A good example of what a man can do by nature is sight. We either can see or cannot see; we cannot either learn to see or improve our seeing.<sup>3</sup> Any craft will serve as a good example of what is invented by an expert. A good craftsman can discover, say, how to make a vessel. After he has invented it, of course, every one with average skill can learn to make it. Every craftsman can now make a vessel, but that does not mean that we did not need a genius to invent it in the first place. The argument is sound so far, but there is a certain difficulty. Before any invention in any given craft was made, there must have been a first step, and this first step could only have been taken by someone who was not a specialist. In other words, before the sage invented morality there can have been no sages. If someone invented morality, he must have done so *qua* man after all and not *qua* sage. All that can really be said is that the sage was a more intelligent man who saw a solution where no one had seen one before. It is for this reason that I said earlier on that the definition of human artifice in terms of reflection is important in this connexion.<sup>4</sup> That human artifice can be learned and made habitual does not concern the sage who invented morality, except in so far as in making his invention he had to keep in mind that it must fulfil these two conditions.

With Mencius the sages, though they cannot be assigned this role, are assigned some part. I Yiin (伊尹) is quoted twice as saying that when heaven

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note in this connexion that it is never very clear whether in Shyuntzyy's view one particular sage king invented morality or a number of sage kings invented it. It would be difficult to know what the other sage kings were responsible for, if only the first was responsible for the invention. It is equally difficult to see how a number of sage kings coming at fairly long intervals could have been jointly responsible for the invention. This seems to be a case of the form of a particular language being the cause for a philosopher failing to make an important distinction by not requiring such a distinction to be made, for, as there is no 'number' in Chinese, it was unnecessary for Shyuntzyy to make any distinction between 'sage king' and 'sage kings'. The same linguistic form being used in both cases, Shyuntzyy had no need to think clearly even to himself whether it was one or more. If he had been aware of the need for making such a distinction and the difficulty involved in saying specifically that morality was invented at a definite time by a particular sage, he might have had second thoughts about the theory of its being invented at all.

<sup>2</sup> See *Shyuntzyy*, ch. 23, J. 17 p. 4b; Legge p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> Loc. cit., p. 3a; Legge p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 555.

produced this people it made those who were first to know and to awaken, awaken the others.<sup>1</sup> Their role is not one of invention but of awakening others and making them realize what is within themselves. In VIA. 7 Mencius says: 'What is common to all hearts is reason and morality. A sage is only he who first got hold of that which is common to all hearts. Hence reason and morality please my heart just as meat pleases my mouth'.<sup>2</sup> We are all delighted with what is moral, but it needs a sage to find out what it is that we are delighted with. He finds out what is common to all moral acts, and systematizes moral principles. A sage in regard to morality may be compared, say, to a grammarian in regard to our speech. We can all recognize correct forms of speech, but it needs a grammarian to find out the system that runs through our speech habits. That Mencius was well qualified to carry out this task of the sage can be seen from the way he dealt with King Shiuan of Chyi.<sup>3</sup> This ability to analyse clearly what pertains to the mind is the ability of the sage. The sage does not invent but awakens others to what is really within themselves.

It may be said that all ancient Chinese philosophers were mainly concerned with practical problems. They were concerned with how people could be made morally good and how government could result in order. In other words they were all concerned with the problem of moral education. Any difference in their way of looking at morality was bound to reflect itself in their methods of moral education. We can go even further and say that it is in the field of moral education that we see clearly the significance of the difference between their moral theories. This is particularly true of Mencius and Shyuntzzy. For Shyuntzzy, since morality is only a device invented by the sages and does not answer to anything which forms part of original human nature, the only way of instilling it into people is by sheer drill and habituation. The favourite analogies resorted to by Shyuntzzy are the straightening of crooked wood by the pressing frame and the sharpening of metal through grinding. Our only hope of success is that if the drilling is thorough enough morality may become second nature to men. For Mencius the position is radically different. Morality is part of original human nature, though as yet only a slender beginning. The way to go about educating people morally is to awaken them to the realization that they have got it within themselves. The analogy of the pressing frame and the grindstone is not only mistaken but vicious. In his criticism of Gawtzzy on precisely this point Mencius is emphatic in his denunciation:—

<sup>1</sup> *Mencius* VA. 7, J. 9 p. 13b ll. 5-6; Legge p. 363; VB. 1, J. 10 p. 1b ll. 4-5; Legge p. 370.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, J. 11 p. 8b ll. 1-4; Legge pp. 406-7.

<sup>3</sup> When the king, after he had spared an ox about to be sacrificed because he could not bear seeing the poor animal going to its death, ordered that a lamb be substituted, he was suspected by the common people of being parsimonious, and had to admit that on the surface the affair must have looked so to the people and that he was really unable to say exactly what his motive was. Mencius pointed out to him that there was a difference between sending the lamb to its death and sending the ox. The king had seen the ox trembling at its imminent fate but he had not seen the lamb. The king then said, 'I did the act, and yet, when I looked into my own heart, I failed to discover my own intention. You say it for me and I feel within me that you have hit upon what I was really after'. (*Op. cit.*, IA. 7, J. 1 pp. 9a ff.; Legge pp. 137 ff.)

‘Gawtzyy said: “Human nature is like the willow, and morality is like cups. To make human nature moral is like making cups out of the willow”. Mencius said: “Is it by following the nature of the willow that you can make it into cups, or do you have to do violence to the willow in order to make it into cups? If you have to do violence to it to make it into cups, then do you also have to do violence to man in order to make him moral? Nothing could be more calculated to lead men to bring disaster upon morality than your words”.’<sup>1</sup>

Mencius’ criticism is not simply that the analogy is inept, for inept analogies, though necessarily useless, may yet be harmless. It is that the misleading implications are positively vicious. It suggests distorting and torturing human nature before it can be made moral. From Mencius’ point of view the situation is totally different. Becoming moral is only a cultivating and a nurturing of what was there in human nature originally. This is very well summed up in the following passage.

‘Mencius said: “The gentleman penetrates deep into the Way, for he wants to find it within himself. If he finds it within himself, then he can feel at home in it. If he can feel at home in it, he can draw greatly on its help. If he can draw greatly on its help, he can take from it left and right and always meet with its source. Hence the gentleman wants to find it within himself”.’<sup>2</sup>

It is only if a man finds morality within himself that he can abide by it and can draw on its resources without the fear of its failing him. Considering the moral demand stated by Mencius that when life and duty are incompatible one ought to ‘forgo life in order to be moral’,<sup>3</sup> it is not surprising that he should have emphasized the possession by the gentleman of endless moral resources. Compared with this it is not easy to see how habituation as advocated by Shyuntzyy could cope with such difficult duties. Habit is all very well in cases where the difficulty is not too great and no conflicts arise in one’s mind. In a case where one is called upon to sacrifice one’s very life, the difficulty in Shyuntzyy’s theory is acute, for, in the last analysis, the only reason Shyuntzyy offers for being moral is the avoidance of strife and disorder, which are harmful. Arguing within the framework of benefit and harm, what is more harmful than death? And if a man is willing to give up his life in order that harm should not befall the world, this is no longer acting from habit, and Shyuntzyy’s whole theory that human nature is evil is in peril. It is significant that Shyuntzyy’s examples of moral actions are never cases of great sacrifices but only comparatively trivial cases like letting one’s elders eat first even though one is hungry and working in their place while one is tired,<sup>4</sup> for these may well be cases where habit alone will see one through. In fact they are the kind of thing that could easily be done without thinking at all. When Shyuntzyy tried to show that a man sometimes embraces death because he thinks life impermissible, it is, as

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., VIA. 1, J. 11 p. 1; Legge p. 394.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., IVB. 14, J. 8 p. 5a; Legge pp. 322–3.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., VIA. 10, J. 11 p. 11a ll. 6–7; Legge p. 411.

<sup>4</sup> *Shyuntzyy*, ch. 23, J. 17 pp. 3b–4a; Legge pp. 80–1.

we have seen, the equivocation on the word *kee*<sup>1</sup> which has prevented the weakness of his argument from being transparent. As Mencius and Shyuntzyy both belonged to the Confucian tradition, they held more or less similar views concerning the demands made by morality on man. On Shyuntzyy's theory of human nature, it is more difficult to show with any plausibility that man can be morally educated so as to live up to the most stringent of those demands. That this is so is a serious drawback, at least when judged from within the tradition to which both philosophers belong.

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 554, n. 1.