

荀子

3. Xunzi

We have explored how, on Mengzi's view of moral self cultivation, one begins with a nascent moral sense and through a process of reflection, study, and effort one gradually strengthens and extends this sense until it becomes a powerful and discriminating moral disposition. Mengzi uses a variety of agricultural metaphors to describe this *development model* of moral self cultivation, and the images he invokes capture the complex and dynamic interplay of environment, attention, effort, natural tendency, and what is probably best described as moral luck,¹ which he sees as defining the task of moral self cultivation. Mengzi believed that the development he described followed a natural process that would unfold when each part of the self was exercised in its proper role, according to its natural function. The *xin* "heart/mind" played a critically important role in this process, being that part of the self uniquely capable of entertaining, weighing, and choosing courses of actions. If exercised in its proper "office" of *si* "reflection," it will guide the self away from bad actions and toward the good. The fact that human beings are, in this way, innately inclined toward the good is the essential force of Mengzi's claim that *xingshan* 性善 "human nature is good." As was made clear, Mengzi did not mean by this that human beings are innately endowed with a complete and perfect moral sense, only that we are inclined toward goodness. As creatures, we have an affinity—a special innate *taste*—for morality.²

The next great figure in the Confucian tradition, Xunzi (310-219 B.C.E.), disagreed with Mengzi on this crucial issue of the character of human nature.³ He advocated the alternative view that *xing'e* 性惡 "human nature is bad" and launched an overt attack on Mengzi's position. But we must explore the exact sense and implications of Xunzi's theory concerning the character of human nature, for these aspects of his thought have often been deeply misunderstood. This will prepare the way for a subsequent discussion of Xunzi's method of self cultivation.

The explicit debate between Xunzi and Mengzi marks the first documented, full-fledged disagreement within the emerging Confucian tradition. All vibrant traditions undergo this kind of internal debate as they struggle, in succeeding times and circumstances, to understand and apply the received teachings which they embrace. It seems fair to say that to participate in such a process of struggle and reinterpretation is a large part of what it means to be *in a tradition*.⁴ In this regard, it is important to remember just how much Mengzi and Xunzi agreed about, for, at the end of the day, they were both Confucians. Indeed, in an important sense, their debate was about who really understood the tradition; though they

disagreed about how to interpret Kongzi's teachings, they both looked to him as the source of and authority for their own views. They too turned to the past, just as Kongzi had before them and just as later Confucians would. But the difference is that both Mengzi and Xunzi and every Confucian who was to follow them explicitly claimed to be followers and defenders of Kongzi and his Way. This is why it makes sense to call them "Confucians."⁵

In terms of their ethical philosophies, Mengzi's and Xunzi's agreement went fairly deep; they do not seem to have disagreed much, if at all, about the character of moral action. That is to say, they did not, when faced with the same or similar situation, recommend different courses of action as right, as contemporary utilitarians and deontologists often do. Their views of the character of the sage, the fully cultivated person, seem to coincide in every important respect. Their disagreements concern the issues of what resources we possess when we begin the process of moral self cultivation and what the course of successful moral self cultivation is. In other words, they part company on the issues of the character of human nature and the process of moral education.⁶

In the course of Chinese history, Xunzi often has been criticized for what is considered to be his rather harsh view of human nature. This has led some traditional scholars to try to explain away his theory in one way or another. A prominent example of this phenomenon is Wang Xianqian (1842-1918), one of the foremost scholars and commentators on Xunzi. In the preface to his work *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 "Collected Commentaries on the *Xunzi*," Wang says,

Formerly, during the Tang dynasty (618-907 C.E.), Han Yü regarded the *Xunzi* as a work with "many fine points and only a few blemishes." By the Song dynasty (960-1279 C.E.), those who attacked the text grew more numerous. If one were to infer the reason for this, it would be his teaching that human nature is bad. But I say that the notion that human nature is bad is not Xunzi's main point or fundamental idea. . . . I am saddened that Xunzi lived in an age of great chaos, when people were lost and confused, which moved him to come up with this theory.⁷

Here, Wang performs what we might call *psychological archeology* to uncover and explain the underlying motivation for Xunzi's theory. He claims that Xunzi was so distraught over the moral depravity of his age that he set forth this dour theory about human nature. However, Wang goes on to insist that, in some deep sense, this was not Xunzi's true view. He seems to say that this is how Xunzi *felt* about the people of his troubled age, but not how he *thought* about human nature *per se*.

More recent studies of Xunzi continue the attempt to "rehabilitate"

Xunzi's thought by explaining away his theory concerning human nature. This is done in at least two ways. First, there are those who argue that Xunzi's "pessimistic" theory complements Mengzi's more optimistic view of human nature.⁸ They see Mengzi as cheerfully pointing out that our glass is half full (i.e., we are *partially good*), whereas Xunzi glumly focuses on the fact that our glass is half empty (i.e., we still are *half bad*). On such an interpretation, Mengzi offers an ideal toward which we are to strive, and is seen as encouraging us to develop the good already within us. Xunzi sets forth restrictions on our actions and warns us to curb our innate tendencies to err. A crucial feature of this position is the contention that the two views are *essentially* the same, differing only in what they emphasize.

Other scholars try to defuse the disagreement between Xunzi and Mengzi in another way, by claiming that they are talking at cross purposes. On this second view, Mengzi and Xunzi are simply using the word *xing* 性 "human nature" in different senses.⁹ Mengzi uses the term to identify what is unique about human nature, as opposed to the nature of other creatures. This leads him to focus on the moral sense, argue that this describes our fundamental nature, and conclude that our nature is basically good. Xunzi, on the other hand, sees human nature in terms of its most basic and enduring features. This leads him to focus on our fundamental instincts, needs, and desires; argue that these constitute our fundamental nature; and conclude that our nature is basically bad.

These interpretations, like the earlier view of Wang Xianqian, seemed to be motivated largely by the desire to mend the rift in the Confucian family. They are based upon the important observation, noted above, that these two thinkers are, after all, Confucians, and must, therefore have much in common. But though this is true and an important point to keep in mind, these scholars have taken this idea too far. This leads them to claim that Mengzi and Xunzi have more in common than the evidence warrants. The unfortunate result is a misrepresentation of Xunzi's distinct and elegant position.¹⁰

Our understanding of Xunzi's theory of human nature has been obscured in other ways as well. For example, to some degree and in certain important respects, it was misunderstood and misrepresented by the justly famous sinologist, Homer H. Dubs.¹¹ However, Dubs's interpretation of Xunzi remains instructive, for seeing why it is wrong helps to bring important features of Xunzi's view into sharp relief and clear focus. Dubs claimed that Xunzi's position represents what I will refer to as an *Augustinian turn* in the Confucian tradition.¹² According to Dubs, Xunzi believed human nature was essentially *evil*. As a consequence, restraining the nature was Xunzi's first and highest priority. Moreover, Dubs correctly points out that Xunzi viewed Mengzi and his

theory about the goodness of human nature as a dire threat to the Confucian Way; and so, Dubs contends, Xunzi devised the *xing'e* slogan (which Dubs understands as "human nature is evil") in order to counter the overly tender-hearted Mengzi.¹³ Dubs sees this move by Xunzi as initiating an *authoritarian* theme in Chinese thought, a theme which he regards as the *de facto* dominant tendency in the Confucian tradition.

Despite the many merits of Dubs's analysis, the central claim of his interpretation is unfounded and misleading. It is wholly unwarranted to ascribe to Xunzi, or any early Chinese thinker, the view that our nature, in whole or in part, is fundamentally and incorrigibly *evil*. There is nothing in Xunzi's thought that approaches the Augustinian notion of sin as an intentional rejection of God's will.¹⁴ There is no hint in his writings that might lead one to think he believed we take a perverse *pleasure* in doing wrong.¹⁵ This is an important point, for in order to have a position opposite to that of Mengzi in the way Dubs believes Xunzi's theory is, this is precisely what Xunzi would have to be saying.

These various interpretations miss the defining and most critical aspect of Xunzi's position; namely, that we begin life in a state of utter moral blindness. Morally, in our natural state, we are rudderless ships. According to Xunzi, we have no innate conception of what morality is; we would not recognize it even if we were to see it plainly before us. Prior to acquiring a proper education, moral categories simply are not part of our view of the world, any more than an appreciation of the notion of irony and the other beauties of literature is innately part of our nature. In the pre-social state of existence, we are led exclusively by our physical desires. In a world of limited goods, inhabited by creatures of more or less unlimited desires, it is inevitable that the result is destructive and alienating competition. This is what Xunzi means by his claim that human nature is bad.

In order to reform our bad nature, we must sign up for and successfully pursue a thorough, prolonged, and difficult course of learning. We must *re-form* our nature—as a warped board is re-formed by steam and pressure—so that it assumes a proper shape and can fit into the grand Confucian design.¹⁶ This grand design is a plan for individuals, families, and society, that provides everyone with roles to fulfill, much as the score of a symphony describes for the members of an orchestra the different parts to play. The Confucian scheme was worked out over long periods of time by a series of gifted sages, through a process of trial and error. It alone provides the way to bring human needs and desires into a harmonious balance with Nature's capacity to produce goods.¹⁷

The learning that one must acquire consists of a thorough understanding of the various ritual practices and social obligations of Confucian society. Xunzi shared these with his rival Mengzi but viewed

them very differently. Whereas Mengzi saw these practices and obligations as the refined manifestation of our nascent moral nature, Xunzi viewed them as wholly *artificial*, the accumulated wisdom of past sages. Xunzi employed a special term of art to capture this sense of the artificial nature of all society. The term is *wei* 爲, "deliberate action."¹⁸

One can see the difference between Mengzi's and Xunzi's views on human nature in the metaphors each thinker employs to convey his thought. Mengzi's moral sprouts and his repertoire of agricultural, *developmental* metaphors give way to a different set of images in Xunzi's *re-formation model*. At one point Xunzi says:

Someone may ask: If human nature is bad, then where do rituals and social obligations come from? I would say, they all come from the *wei* "deliberate action" of the sages; essentially, they are not products of human nature. A potter molds clay and makes a vessel, but the vessel is the product of the deliberate action of the potter, not essentially a product of his nature. A carpenter carves a piece of wood and makes a utensil, but the utensil is the product of the deliberate action of the carpenter, not essentially a product of his nature. Sages gathered together their thoughts and ideas, experimented with various types of deliberate action and produced rituals and social obligations and set forth laws and regulations. Hence these are all products of the deliberate action of the sages, not essentially products of their nature.¹⁹

Xunzi sees morality itself as fundamentally artificial. Those who successfully pursue the course of study he recommends do not begin life with a moral sense which they go on to *develop*; they *acquire* a sensibility they never before had. It is true that all people possess the ability to acquire moral sensibility and also true that certain capacities that people possess at birth are more easily enlisted into the cause of morality and play a more critical role in keeping us on the moral path.²⁰ Nevertheless, until these innate abilities and capacities are given a proper and balanced shape, they tend to lead us into conflict rather than to morality. Even something as important in our ethical lives as our love for our children, if left undirected and unrefined, easily tends toward bad results. We need to pull hard against the promptings of our untutored nature in order to avoid vices such as nepotism and hold ourselves steady in order to move closer to what is right and proper.

According to Xunzi's view, those first embarking upon a study of the Way cannot really appreciate the moral dimensions of life. This is why they have great need not only for tradition but for teachers, who can guide them and help them to see and savor the many benefits available through the *Dao*.²¹ Those who choose to study the Way are driven to it

largely out of fear of the life they know and understand—the chaotic, dangerous, and profoundly unfulfilling life outside the Way.²² Under the guidance of one who does understand, these students of the Way can come to appreciate more fully its simple and direct advantages. With further study, their understanding reaches the point where they begin to take profound satisfaction in virtue and ritual practice.

A comparison with the empiricist view of language acquisition may help to illustrate my understanding of Xunzi's view of how we come to have a moral sense of the world.²³ According to language empiricists, we begin life without language or any innate affinity to acquire natural languages. A person espousing this view of language acquisition might argue that when placed among competent language users, one acquires language purely as a tool in the service of one's basic needs and desires. But, as one is led to see and understand certain features about oneself and the world, instead of using language exclusively in an instrumental fashion—purely as a means to satisfy basic needs and desires—one may come to see it as intrinsically valuable, and as a new source of satisfaction. If our hypothetical language student has the necessary talent, training, energy, and luck, she may develop into a true poet—someone who regards the right kind of language as life itself. She would then achieve the literary equivalent of the Confucian sage; her love of and devotion to her art would mirror the sage's delight in and dedication to the Way.

An appreciation of literature—and this includes the wonder of it as a unique creation of human societies—is an *acquired taste*. Illiterate people simply (quite literally: *literally*) cannot understand these beauties; they see no meaning and find no satisfaction in the written word. This is why it is impossible to make a direct, compelling case to such individuals about the inherent value of such pursuits. One might appeal to the difficulty of getting around in society without knowing how to read. This is something such people know all too well. One could point out that literacy will increase their earning power—this is something everyone can understand. But one could not effectively appeal to the inherent value of literature. This is something one has to see from the inside of a life that includes such goods. On Xunzi's view, morality is like this, something the uninitiated can only understand in terms of its immediate usefulness in the quest to avoid harm and satisfy their basic desires; they have no innate *taste* for it, no *real* appreciation of it.

But, if people acquire enough knowledge about themselves and the world they inhabit, they will discover that there are new sources of profound satisfaction, beyond simply avoiding harm and fulfilling basic desires. There are things more valuable than life itself. The longer one studies, the more one understands, the deeper one's appreciation of the

Way will be. The culmination of this process is a fundamental change in one's evaluative scheme. It is not that one no longer recognizes the good of avoiding harm or that one no longer takes satisfaction in fulfilling basic desires, but one sees these through a more powerful lens that reveals their true proportion in a larger picture of the good life. In the initial stages of self cultivation, knowledge of the Way will enable one to override one's errant desires. As one's understanding deepens and, with sustained and concerted practice, one shapes oneself to the moral way, one discovers new, richer, and more powerful sources of satisfaction within a newly unfolding form of life. At this point, the initial tension between what one desires and what is right weakens, one finds additional motivation to do what is right and one comes to see how many of one's basic desires not only can be satisfied but enhanced in a well-lived life.²⁴ If one succeeds in becoming a sage, one will no longer need to struggle against recalcitrant desires, for one's desires will be in complete accord with what is right.

As one reads the *Xunzi*, one is struck by the low opinion he has of human beings in their pre-social state.²⁵ But this only serves to increase his reverence for their achievements. When human beings get things right, things are *really* right. He expresses nothing less than a religious reverence for culture, which for him has as its core the Confucian rites. At one point he says,

Through the rites Heaven and earth join in harmony, the sun and the moon shine, the four seasons proceed in order, the stars and constellations march, the rivers flow, and all things flourish; people's likes and dislikes are regulated and their joys and hates made appropriate. Those below are obedient, those above are enlightened; all things move through their various changes but do not become disordered; only those who turn their backs upon the rites will be destroyed. Are the rites not wonderful indeed! ²⁶

Xunzi believed, and here he seems to be largely correct, that most of the valuable things we experience or know of are things that we have *acquired* through the good fortune of living in the right kinds of societies, and that we are largely unaware of the debt we owe to those whose fruits we now enjoy. He saw Mengzi's claim that we all possess an innate moral sense as a Promethean arrogance, a delusion that would have disastrous results. Such a view would lead people to ignore the wisdom of the sages and their hard-wrought insights and follow the false and fickle light of an imaginary moral sense.²⁷ Mengzi's theory of human nature would lead people to believe that they knew more than they could possibly know, relying only upon their innate intuitions.

Although Xunzi has a rather dim view of our nature, he is tremendously optimistic and has great confidence in our ability to

transform that nature.²⁸ He shares this profound optimism with Mengzi; both believed in the fundamental perfectibility of human beings.²⁹ However, their views on the nature of the process leading to this state differ considerably. Mengzi's view of moral self cultivation describes the process as a natural flowering or *development* of inherent tendencies. Xunzi sees it as the difficult and demanding task of acquiring a second nature. For Xunzi, successful self cultivation requires protracted and concerted effort, for the task is to constrain and *re-form* a recalcitrant and unruly nature.³⁰

Again, the differences between Mengzi and Xunzi are clearly visible in the images they each invoke. Gone is Mengzi's patient farmer, the devoted cultivator, and in her place is an artisan, working in a difficult medium. Xunzi says:

A piece of wood as straight as a plumb line may [with soaking and shaping] be bent into a circle as true as any drawn with a compass, and once the wood has dried it will not straighten out again. The process of bending has made it that way. Thus, if [crooked] wood is placed against a straightening board, it can be made straight; if metal is put to the grindstone, it can be sharpened; and if the gentleman studies widely and each day examines himself, his wisdom will become clear and his conduct without fault.³¹

This passage might remind one of Kant's remark: *Aus so krummem Holze, als woraus der Mensch gemacht ist, kann nichts ganz Gerades gezimmert werden*. "One cannot hope to make anything perfectly straight out of such crooked timber as man is made."³² But, as noted above, while Xunzi shares this rather dim view of our *nature*, he is much more optimistic about the possibility of working this raw material into something that is without flaw. Xunzi assures us that with enough work of the right sort, we can straighten the crooked timber of humanity in a way that will ensure that it will remain straight. He expresses this idea by way of a different metaphor—borrowed from the *Odes*—saying that we can transform our rough and unformed nature into a precious and unblemished gem.³³ Another important difference from Kant is that Xunzi looked to the tried and true methods of past sages—social practices and obligations that had evolved over the course of human history—instead of pure reason as his standard and guide.

Xunzi thought one could transform one's nature and achieve a state in which one would no longer be in tension with one's "lower self." Once one had "bent" one's nature into the proper form, it retained this shape without further struggle. But this did not come without great effort. As noted earlier, it required, above all else, profound perseverance and singleness of purpose. As Xunzi says:

Those who miss one shot in a hundred cannot be called really good archers. Those who set out on a thousand-mile journey and break down half a pace from the destination cannot be called really good carriage drivers. Those who do not comprehend moral relationships and categories and who do not make themselves one with benevolence and righteousness cannot be called really good scholars. Learning basically means to achieve this oneness.³⁴

The process Xunzi describes does not have at its core an innate moral sense that, by its natural delight in morality and revulsion to what is bad, provides us with a weak yet persistent moral guide. The course of moral self cultivation is not a process of *developing* innate "moral sprouts." According to Xunzi, we cannot steer by our own internal light, for this light is not yet lit. The illumination of morality is something we must *acquire*; it is something handed down from the sages. As a consequence and in contrast to what Mengzi taught, reflecting upon one's intuitions is not a prominent element of Xunzi's program of moral education. He provides very different counsel. We are to keep ourselves focused on the task of learning. Referring to the notions of *si* "reflection" and *xue* "learning," which serve as a central theme of this study, Xunzi tells us:

I once spent a whole day in *si* "reflection," but I found it of less value than a moment of *xue* "learning." I once tried standing on tiptoe and gazing into the distance, but I found I could see much farther by climbing to a high place.³⁵

Xunzi's high place was the edifice of culture which, as human beings, is our unique and precious inheritance. His advice was to climb to this high place by following the steep and rugged path of learning. He believed it was a long and arduous climb, but he also believed it afforded a vast and incomparable view.

Notes

1. In this context, I mean by "moral luck" whether or not one happens to be born in an age when the Way is flourishing, in a state that propagates it and, in a family that nurtures and cultivates one's moral inclinations. These are monumentally important factors that for most people will decide the course of their moral lives but which seem wholly a matter of good or bad fortune. The analysis of moral luck in the west tends to be focused more on individual actions and their consequences. For example, see Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck" in *Mortal Questions* reprint (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (London: Cambridge

University Press, 1986) and Bernard Williams, "Moral Luck" in *Moral Luck* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

2. Mengzi himself likens the cultivated moral sense to the palate of a connoisseur of fine food or music in 6A7 Cf. 6A10.

3. The dates for Xunzi's life are from John Knoblock, "The Chronology of Xunzi's Works," *Early China*, 8 (1982-1983): 29-52. Professor Knoblock has also produced a complete translation and study of the text. See his *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press (vol. 1, 1988; vol. 2, 1990, vol. 3, 1994). For a general study of Xunzi's thought, see Paul R. Goldin, *Rituals of the Way: The Philosophy of Xunzi* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999).

4. For an enlightening discussion of the internal struggles traditions undergo, which uses the contemporary west as an example, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). In his later work, MacIntyre goes on to explore how different traditions, which define competing forms of rationality, can still interact and challenge one another. See his *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). One of the most revealing accounts of how traditions inform human lives with persisting value is Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). T. C. Kline has done an impressive job applying the insights of Shils and others to the specific case of Xunzi. See his "Moral Agency and Motivation in the Xunzi" in Kline and Ivanhoe, *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*.

5. Some members of the tradition might be seen as presenting challenges to this generalization. For example, Wang Yangming, whose views we examine below, insisted that he had greater trust in his own moral mind than the words of Kongzi. But even Wang expressed his allegiance to Kongzi's Way and like other Confucians referred to him as *the sage and teacher*.

6. This is an important point and not only for understanding the differences between Mengzi and Xunzi. Several contemporary accounts of the nature of virtue suffer because they do not clearly distinguish the abilities and dispositions of highly cultivated individuals from those who are, to varying degrees, undeveloped. This leads some philosophers to talk about abilities like moral sensitivity and discernment as if they were innate faculties rather than largely acquired dispositions. While Mengzi and Xunzi disagree about how much is acquired, neither of them makes the mistake of seeing moral sensitivity or discrimination as fully formed, innate faculties. However, as we shall see, later Confucians, for example Wang Yangming, do make this kind of claim. John McDowell offers a good example of a contemporary philosopher who makes this type of mistake (in the course of many fascinating observations). He repeatedly deploys a set of ocular metaphors to describe moral perception and these obscure rather than make clear important issues

about human nature and the course of moral development. See his, "Values and Secondary Qualities," in Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, ed., *Essays on Moral Realism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988): 166-80, and "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume 52* (1978): 13-29.

7. Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Changsha, 1891). Wang's reference is to Han Yü's 韓愈 (768-824 C.E.) work *Du Xun* 讀荀 "Reading the Xunzi." See *Han Changli quanji* 韓昌黎全集 11:15a-b (SBBY).

8. The clearest proponent of this view is Antonio S. Cua. See his *Ethical Argumentation: A Study in Hsun Tzu's Moral Epistemology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985): 15 and *passim*. I have benefitted from the unpublished work of Derek Fung Ling on this aspect of Xunzi's ethical thought.

9. For example, see D. C. Lau, "Theories of Human Nature in Mengzi and Xunzi" in Kline and Ivanhoe, *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*.

10. The assumption which leads all of these later scholars astray is that belonging to a tradition is a matter of sharing certain core doctrines. Rather, belonging to a tradition is a matter of sharing a canon and being part of an ongoing, developing dialogue. Cf. MacIntyre on this issue. (I owe this observation to Bryan W. Van Norden.)

11. Homer H. Dubs, "Mencius and Sun-dz on Human Nature" *Philosophy East and West* 6 (1965): 213-22.

12. Dubs himself likens Xunzi's position to that of Augustine. See "Mencius and Sun-dz," p. 216.

13. This aspect of Dubs' view is well justified. Xunzi wrote an entire essay dedicated to refuting Mengzi's view of human nature, raising a number of arguments against its plausibility and pointing out the dire consequences such a theory could precipitate. Moreover, Xunzi's theory that human nature is bad can be seen as a background assumption supporting many other claims he makes throughout his writings. For a translation of Xunzi's "Human Nature Is Bad" chapter, see Burton Watson, tr., *Hsun Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963): 157-71.

14. As Joel Kupperman astutely points out, Augustinian-style views presuppose a *knowledge* of the good that Xunzi's view explicitly rejects. See his "Xunzi: Morality as Psychological Constraint" in Kline and Ivanhoe, *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*.

15. Compare this with Augustine's description of stealing pears with his friends, "... (we) carried away great loads, not to eat ourselves, but to fling to the very swine, having only eaten some of them; and to do this pleased us all the more because it was not permitted. . . I should be gratuitously wanton, having no inducement to evil but the evil itself. It was

foul and I loved it. I loved to perish. I loved my own error—not that for which I erred, but the error itself. Base soul, falling from Thy firmament to utter destruction—not seeking aught through the shame but the shame itself!" *The Confessions in Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, Whitney J. Oates, tr. (New York: Random House, 1948): 24.

16. My use of the term *re-formation* is intended to distinguish Xunzi's type of moral education from Mengzi's developmental model. Jonathan W. Schofer was the first to articulate this difference. He explores this aspect of Xunzi's thought, as well as others, in his lucid and insightful article, "Virtues in Xunzi's Thought" in Kline and Ivanhoe, *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*.

17 I describe this feature of Xunzi's philosophy in "A Happy Symmetry: Xunzi's Ethical Thought," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59.2 (Summer, 1991): 309-22. For an incisive study of Xunzi's social and political views, see Henry Rosemont, Jr., "State and Society in the Xunzi: A Philosophical Commentary" in Kline and Ivanhoe, *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*.

18. It is not clear whether Xunzi actually devised a new character for this notion, i.e., adding the "human" radical to the character meaning "to do," or whether this graphic distinction was the work of later scholars. But Xunzi surely used the word in precise and novel ways. In the "Rectifying Names" chapter he provides two related yet distinct senses of the term *wéi*: (1) individual intentional actions and (2) dispositions or critical habits developed through repeated intentional actions. In modern Chinese, the word *wéi* retains the sense of "artificial." In modern usage, it also has the connotation of something that is "false," a sense not present in Xunzi's original use of the term.

19. Adapted from Watson, *Hsun Tzu: Basic Writings*, p. 160.

20. David Wong was the first to make this aspect of Xunzi's philosophy fully explicit. See his "Xunzi on Moral Motivation" in Kline and Ivanhoe, *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*. T. C. Kline provides the clearest account of such innate tendencies and describes them as parts of our nature that through practice of the Way can be "conscripted" into the cause of morality. See his "Moral Agency and Motivation in the Xunzi."

21. By comparison, the role and importance of tradition and teachers are not prominent themes in the writings of Mengzi.

22. Of course there are certain straightforward goods associated with a life according to the Way. Under normal circumstances the moral person enjoys a broad range of material, social, and psychological goods. Many of these can be understood by the uninitiated as well and provide some motivation to undertake a study of the Way. But Xunzi tends to focus on the order, security, and safety afforded by the Way and oppose this to the chaotic, precarious, and perilous life outside the Way. Perhaps this is because he felt that if someone was motivated exclusively or even primarily by more mundane

concerns, they would not be able to withstand the demands and sacrifices necessary to master the Way.

23. Much of my discussion of the difference between language empiricists and language innatists is based upon the analysis to be found in Ian Hacking, *Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy?* reprint (London: Cambridge University Press, 1990). 57-69

24. For example, one can satisfy one's basic desire for sex in a richer and more meaningful way through a sustained and mutually respectful relationship than through wanton promiscuity. One can satisfy a desire for adventure and danger in more complex and fulfilling ways by serving in some socially worthy cause that involves chance and risk.

25. The opening of the "Discussion of Rites" chapter presents a picture of the pre-social state that is worthy of Hobbes's well-turned phrase: "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."

26. Watson, *Hsun Tzu: Basic Writings*, p. 94

27. Xunzi states this explicitly in the "Human Nature Is Bad" chapter. See Watson, *Hsun Tzu: Basic Writings*, pp. 162-3.

28. Whereas Hobbes assumes that people have the capacity to devise and enter into contracts, Xunzi argues that we can escape the state of nature because we have a capacity for self-transformation. Such a capacity rests upon the human ability to make distinctions and evaluate among them (for example, see the chapter "Against Physiognomy") and to organize themselves in different ways (for example, see the chapter "The Regulations of a King").

29. This is one important way in which they differ from many western thinkers. In particular, it distinguishes Xunzi from thinkers like Hobbes or Freud, with whom he shares certain similarities. Since Xunzi believes that one can *transform* oneself in fundamental ways, he can avoid certain classic difficulties encountered by thinkers like Hobbes, who offer contractarian ethical philosophies. Since the process of self cultivation transforms the self and changes the calculus by which one decides what one is to do, Xunzi avoids the set of problems associated with "prisoner's dilemma" situations.

30. Thus for Xunzi, the most important virtues a beginning student can have are singleness of purpose and tenacity. This is a consistent theme of Xunzi's and is prominent in the opening chapter of the text, "Encouraging Learning." Elsewhere, I have argued that in this respect Xunzi is much closer to Kongzi than is Mengzi. See my "Thinking and Learning In Early Confucianism." Also, see Schofer's article (cited above in note 16) for an incisive discussion of the nature of virtue in Xunzi's thought and this issue in particular.

31. Adapted from Watson, *Hsun Tzu: Basic Writings*, p. 15.

32. Immanuel Kant, "Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht" (1784). For a complete translation of this essay,

see Patrick Gardiner, ed., *Theories of History* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1959). 22-34

33. In chapter 27, Xunzi follows Kongzi by employing a quote from the *Odes* to make an analogy between self cultivation and the art of lapidary. He says, "Human beings are to the study of culture as jade is to cutting and polishing. And so the *Odes* says, 'Like cutting, like filing, like grinding, like polishing.'" See *Analects* 1.15 for the same idea. Cf. pp. 3-4.

34. Adapted from Watson, *Hsun Tzu Basic Writings*, p. 22.

35. Adapted from Watson, *Hsun Tzu Basic Writings*, p. 16. In this passage, Xunzi paraphrases Kongzi. For the similar passage in the *Analects*, see 15.31. Compare Xunzi's view with that of Kongzi, as described in chapter 1, pages 2-3. I discuss this issue in considerable detail and in relation to Mengzi's thought in "Thinking and Learning in Early Confucianism "