

Reply to Professor Pang-White's Commentary

Rong-Lin Wang

I am happy to learn that Professor Pang-White agrees with “my analysis on many fronts.” I fully endorse her suggestion that the Chinese character *xin* (心) is best translated as “heart-mind” or “to feel-think at the same time”, if by “think” one means not only reasoning but also reflection, in particular self-reflection.

Professor Pang-White raises 3 questions. They are all important and at the same time thought-provoking. The first question concerns King Xuan's replacement of the sacrificial ox with a lamb for he cannot bear to see the ox trembling with fear on the way to be slaughtered. The King's action seems to be silly. Since both animals, as Professor Pang-White stresses, are capable of suffering, why bother to spare the ox and replace it with a lamb?

Indeed, the people of Qi (齊), after learning of the incident about the King, were led to conclude that the King was stingy. The King was thus misunderstood by his people. The replacement of the ox with a lamb seems unreasonable for two reasons. Firstly, it goes against the rituals. Now, let's imagine, if the King had asked Mengzi “what should I do?” Mengzi would have probably answered that the King should abide by the rituals, and that he

should not spare the ox. Not because Mengzi was a rigid conformist, but because Mengzi would have probably endorsed what Confucius said about the importance of *li* (禮). Indeed, the practice of rituals plays such a key role in moral cultivation that Confucius once said to Zi Gong (子貢), a disciple of Confucius, whose name is Ci (賜), and who “wished to do away with the offering of a sheep connected with the inauguration of the first day of each month,” that “Ci, you love the sheep; I love the rituals.” (*Analects* 3:17, translated by J. Legge, with modification). Although Mengzi acknowledged the significant role played by the practice of rituals in moral cultivation, he did not blame the King for violating the rituals. Mengzi led the King, in a roundabout way, to see that his action might seem unreasonable. And this brings us back to the second reason why the replacement looks like unreasonable. Because, as Professor Pang-White notes, both animals are capable of suffering, the King’s action not only goes against the rituals but also turns out to be silly.

It is noteworthy that Mengzi did not blame the King for violating the rituals, he did not blame the King for being silly, either. Indeed, if, counterfactually, the King had seen the ox shrink with fear, like an innocent man going to the place of execution, and the King were utterly indifferent, then Mengzi would have probably blamed the King for being morally insensitive. The King’s replacement of the ox with a lamb may seem kind of silly, but such a silly king is morally better than a morally insensitive one like King Hui of Liang (梁惠王). Mengzi blamed the latter for moral insensitivity. As indicated in my paper, while people were dying from famine, there was plenty of fat meat in King Hui’s kitchen, and fat horses in his stables. King Hui was morally insensitive insofar as he failed to have an appropriate moral feeling, e.g.,

compassion, for his suffering people. Mengzi even went so far as to “justify” King Xuan’s seemingly silly replacement: while the King saw the ox shrink with fear, the King did not see the lamb. Such a difference not only explains why the King spared the ox and replaced it with a lamb, but also makes the King’s replacement reasonable, which otherwise would have been a silly action. Again, in this case, an action would have been unreasonable were it not for the agent’s moral feeling.

The second question that Professor Pang-White raises concerns the Mengzian way to remove obstacles that obstruct natural outgrowth of the innate moral sprouts. In particular, it concerns how not to be misled by philosophical doctrines. Mengzi finds fault with Mohism. According to Professor Pang-White, Mengzi would say that Mohism represents an extreme altruism, which extends the innate moral feelings to the extreme, and that is inhumane. I agree with Professor Pang-White that Mengzi would probably consider Mohism to be extending too much. Too much to be humane, I would say. However, that is not the only way Mohism misled the contemporaries of Mengzi. According to Mengzi, Mohism denies not only that we are born with moral sprouts, but also that moral virtues grow from the moral sprouts. In addition, Mohism denies that a person of virtue is motivated by moral feelings, and that there is no moral knowledge without moral feelings. Insofar as Mohism denies all of these claims, it misleads people and goes against the Confucian Way. Mohism, according to Mengzi, has nothing to extend, for they deny that all humans are born with moral sprouts, and they do not accept that all virtues are both natural and internal. So my answer to Professor Pang-White’s second question would be both yes

and no. Yes, because from the Confucian perspective, Mohism extends too much. No, because Mohism denies innate moral sprouts. Mohism, unlike Mengzi, undermines the role moral feelings are supposed to play, not merely in moral knowledge, moral motivation, but also in moral cultivation. Since according to Mohism, there is no moral sprout, there is nothing to extend. Since they have nothing to extend, they cannot extend too much.

Professor Pang-White's 3rd question is about whether there is a 3rd factor that impedes the natural development of moral feelings. In addition to the factors that I mention in my paper, including one's being led astray by biased or perverse philosophical doctrines, one can also fail to act out of a self-reflectively endorsed moral emotion, or impediment due to insecure material circumstances, Professor Pang-White wonders if there is another inhibiting factor related, in particular, to socially induced influences, like habits or cultural ethos. In my view, philosophical doctrines vary from one state to another, and philosophical doctrines or schools partly constitute what one would call cultural ethos. One's being led astray by biased or perverse philosophical doctrines is thus related to socially induced influences. Still, it is true that I pay little attention to factors such as habits or social convention. Professor Pang-White's 3rd question reminds me of the necessity for further considering other factors that impede the natural development of moral feelings. And I am grateful to her for the reminder.