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Moral Sensitivity, Emotion-Based Theory of Ethics, and Confucian Moral Psychology*

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Abstract

According to David B. Wong's account of Mengzian extension, the dichotomization of reason and emotion is unwarranted. Reasoning and feeling interact and interweave to the extent that feeling becomes morally intelligent, and reasoning becomes motivationally efficacious. I agree with Wong that cognition certainly plays a role in moral cultivation. However, I remain neutral towards the issue of whether reasoning and emotion are non-dichotomous. Drawing on the phenomenon of moral failure due to moral insensitivity, I argue instead that Mengzian ethics is best characterized as emotion-based. Moral reasoning, without emotion's guidance, runs the risk of going astray. The justification of moral judgments, if not exclusively in terms of the inborn

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moral feelings, runs the risk of being mistaken. Moral emotion is the measure of reasonableness, not the other way around. Insofar as moral emotion plays so significant a role not only in moral reasoning, but also in moral motivation and moral cultivation, Mengzian ethics is distinctly emotion-based. To show how the Mengzian extension is supposed to proceed, I draw on the idea of moral insensitivity and argue that it begins, negatively, by weeding out various factors that inhibit one from acting out of self-reflectively endorsed moral emotion and, positively, by improving one's moral sensitivity through increasingly enlarging one's sensitivity zone.

Keywords: Mengzian extension, David B. Wong, moral emotion, moral insensitivity, moral cultivation

Moral Sensitivity, Emotion-Based Theory of Ethics, and Confucian Moral Psychology

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The passage in *Mengzi* 1A:7 records a discussion, between Mengzi and King Xuan of Qi 齊宣王, about what it takes to be a true king, and whether King Xuan himself could become one. According to Mengzi, a true king's virtue consists in caring for and protecting the common people, and King Xuan indeed has the ability to become such a virtuous king. To show that this is the case, Mengzi reminded the King of a recent incident in which the King himself, out of compassion, spared an ox that was led to the site of ritual slaughter, and ordered that a lamb be used in its place. The King recalled and said, "I could not bear to see it shrink with fear, like an innocent man going to the place of execution" (Lau, 1970: 55). The incident was supposed to remove from the King any self-doubts about his ability to care for and protect the common people. Once the self-doubting was removed, Mengzi asked the King: why is it that his kindness was enough to reach to animals and yet not enough to extend to the people? In response, the King referred to his ambition, which Mengzi identified as territorial expansion. Mengzi then argued that the way to achieve the

King's ambition is to practice benevolent government, which means to extend his kindness to the common people.

The interpretation of the passage, as Kwong-loi Shun remarks, is a matter of controversy (Shun, 1997: 141). Consensus among interpreters remains limited. It is generally agreed that Mengzi was trying to show the king that he had the ability to care for his people. What remains unclear, however, is whether Mengzi "was at the same time trying to motivate the king to care for his people and, if so, how this is supposed to come about" (*Ibid.*). Like many interpreters, and David B. Wong is one among them, I believe that Mengzi was trying to augment the king's motivation to look after his people, which is essential to becoming a true king. And the way to achieve this goal is to accomplish some sort of extension. And to accomplish this extension, it suffices for the king, according to Mengzi, to take up his heart of compassion for the ox and apply it to another object, his people. The question that remains controversial and remains to be dealt with is the following: What is the nature of this Mengzian extension? What exactly, in the process of extension, is Mengzi asking the king to do? (Ivanhoe, 2002: 227)

I agree with Wong that the "logical extension" interpretation is inadequate (Wong, 2002: 190; Cf. Nivison, 1980; Shun, 1989). On this reading, the judgment that the king ought to feel compassion for his people is understood as a judgment about logical consistency. But, as Wong nicely puts it, "we cannot interpret Mengzi as holding that appropriate and motivationally effective moral feeling can be generated purely by appeal to logical consistency" (Wong, 2002: 191). I also agree with Wong that the "emotive extension" interpretation turns out to be inadequate as well. On this reading, extension is

primarily a matter of impressing the king with sufficient force and vividness that his people are in need of compassion (Cf. Van Norden, 1991; Ihara, 1991; Im, 1999). Although the "emotive extension" interpretation, Wong writes, "has the virtue of explaining why Mengzi could expect the King to feel compassion for his people and why he would call the King's failure to act compassionately a simple omission rather than inability to act," we cannot attribute to Mengzi "the view that the innate moral feelings are fully developed and already contain all the action-guiding content they need to have" (Wong, 2002: 191). If both the "logical" and the "emotive extension" interpretations are too extreme to be plausible, then it is necessary to locate some conceptual space between the logical and the emotive extension. This leads Wong to a third alternative, and to claim that the "developmental extension" is the only plausible reading. On this view, "Mengzian extension involves significant alteration, expansion, or refinement of emotional capacities and that such change cannot come about merely through recognition of logical consistency." Among variants of the third alternative, Wong rebuts one variant which holds that the development of our emotional capacities involves no essential reasoning. Wong concedes that it is quite plausible "that Mengzi recognized ways of developing moral feeling that do not rely on reasoning" (*Ibid.*). Nonetheless, he reminds us that the crucial question is whether Mengzi "thought this sort of nonrational development is sufficient for full-blown self-cultivation" (*Ibid.*). On this account, Wong also does not hold that reasoning alone is sufficient for the needed development of emotional capacities. The conclusion that Wong reaches is that "we need an interpretation of emotional development that shows how

reasoning is necessary but not sufficient for full-blown Mengzian extension" (*Ibid.*).

Wong's "developmental extension" does fare better than the other readings. And it seems to me undeniably that moral reasoning is part of what constitutes a full-blown self-cultivation, insofar as moral knowledge is part of what constitutes virtue. However, what is distinctive of the Mengzian extension, it seems to me, does not consist in reasoning, if by reasoning it means the recognition of normative reasons, in terms of which one can justify one's actions. Let me explain further.

As discussed above, Mengzi's goal, when he engaged King Xuan in that dialogue appeared in *Mengzi* 1A:7, is to motivate the King to become compassionate toward the common people, and the way to achieve this goal is to accomplish "extension." As is well known, there is always a gap between one's cognitive recognition of normative reasons and one's effective motivation, i.e., between one's knowing what morality requires of oneself and one's being effectively motivated to act on moral requirements.[1] It follows that there is always a gap between the King's reasoning and his motivation. Now, if the Mengzian extension consists in adding felt care for the people to the King's motivation, then it is not so much a matter of cognitive recognition of normative reasons, by which the King may justify his compassionate action and become effectively motivated to act. Any reading of the Mengzian extension that appeals to the King's reasoning as essential thus faces a dilemma: either the King's reasoning can be shown to

[1] If one embraces the Humean account of motivation, one might go so far as to claim that reasoning alone never motivates. Note that my argument does not presuppose the Humean account of motivation, and, if valid, it applies to non-Humeans as well, at least to some of them.

add to his motivation or it cannot. In the case where it cannot, the King's reasoning turns out to be inessential. In the case where it can, the King's reasoning runs the risk of being redundant. The reason for its being redundant is that, in this case, the King's moral feeling alone suffices for the Mengzian extension. There is no need for reasoning to play any role in adding to the king's motivation. Such a dilemma seems to lead us to conclude that since the Mengzian extension consists in adding to the King's motivation to care for the people, a plausible reading need not appeal to the King's reasoning.

The dilemmatic argument may not impress Wong, for he probably would dismiss it as a false dilemma. Indeed, against a long-standing dichotomy in Western thinking, Wong (1991, 2021) argues that there is no dichotomous distinction between reason and emotion in Mengzi. Thus, in order to better understand the Mengzian extension, one needs to guard against the dichotomization of reason and emotion. Instead of seeing reason as opposed to emotion, one needs to see them as complementary, to the extent that they can "interact and interweave" with each other. As Wong says,

> Affect-laden reflection has the power to shape us. Mengzi's conception of how emotion can be transformed and extended through felt reflection is a corrective to two opposing one-sided tendencies in Western thinking about the relation between reflection and emotion. One tendency, represented by Kant, is to think of emotion as a threatening distraction from the kind of dispassionate and objective thinking that ideally guides human conduct. The other tendency, represented by Hume, is to think of emotion as the dominant force in human life,

> dictating our ultimate aims and assigning to reason, if it is up to it (and on some interpretations of Hume, it is not up to even that), the task of figuring out how best to realize those aims. This dichotomization of reflection and emotion leaves out the ways that the two can interact and interweave: through its marriage with feeling, reflection becomes motivationally effective, and through being guided by moral reflection, the feeling becomes intelligent. (2021: 40)

Wong's account, if successful, has the virtue of showing that both reflection (reasoning) and emotion have an essential role to play in the Mengzian extension. As a result, the above-mentioned dilemma fails to undermine his account. In addition, Wong's account of moral cultivation has the virtue of being supported by evidence from empirical studies. As Wong (2017) points out, among the many child-rearing methods conducted by anthropological study across cultures, one turns out to be quite effective. It consists in teaching children to recognize the moral norms when they are in emotionally evocative moments. What makes such teaching effective is the association of one's moral feeling with one's moral judgment. In such cases, in Wong's view, feeling becomes morally intelligent, and intelligence becomes motivationally efficacious. And this, according to Wong, is precisely the way that the Mengzian extension is supposed to proceed.

Moreover, the role that reasoning plays, on Wong's account, is not confined to one's recognition of normative reasons by means of which one can justify one's actions. Since reasoning is supposed to interact and interweave with feeling, one's reasoning, including one's correct assessment

of situation, contributes to one's having the right sort of motivationally efficacious feeling. Wong refers to a number of passages in the *Mengzi*, including 1A:7 and 3A:5, as textual evidence in favor of his reading. Wong reminds us that, in 1A:7, when King Xuan explains his desire to spare the ox upon seeing its fear, he likens the ox to an innocent man going to the place of execution. What is implied here, as Wong stresses and makes it explicitly, is the relevance of innocence to the appropriateness of compassion. The same can be said of the passages in 3A:5. In response to the Mohist Yi Zhi's 夷之 articulation of "love without distinctions," Mengzi's remark that it is not the child's fault that he is about to fall into a well and suffer, which otherwise would be enigmatic without a proper context, seems to support Wong's account of Mengzian reasoning, i.e., that reasoning (taking into account morally relevant distinctions) is essential to having the right sort of feeling or love.

As has been made clear, the type of "developmental extension" that Wong formulates has, as its core, the idea that the dichotomization of reason and emotion is unwarranted. Since the dichotomization fails, both reasoning and feeling play an essential role in the Mengzian extension. Based on textual evidence as well as empirical research findings, the best way to characterize the relation between reasoning and feeling is that they interact and interweave to the extent that feeling becomes morally intelligent and reasoning becomes motivationally efficacious. And, according to Wong, this is precisely what Mengzi is trying to do with King Xuan in 1A:7.

There is no doubt that Wong's account has made a great contribution to our understanding of Mengzi, and to our appreciation and appropriation of Mengzi's wisdom. Instead of becoming outdated, Mengzi's view of moral

cultivation, in the light of Wong's interpretation, remains inspiring and promising. Wong's account merits careful consideration and further discussion, and I am convinced that it will continue to draw much attention in the future. That being said, one disconcerting issue remains. The non-dichotomy model that Wong advocates seems to seek integration of reason with emotion without giving priority to either. However, if one takes seriously Mengzi's claim in 2A:6 and 6A:7 that the four sprouts are essential to all human beings,[2] and the claim in 6A:8 that moral feelings with proper nourishment would naturally grow out of these four sprouts,[3] it casts doubt on the idea that Mengzi gives no priority to emotion over reason. Additionally, if one takes seriously the Confucian suggestion that moral feelings play so significant a role as the source of moral motivation, the foundation of moral knowledge, and the guidance of moral cultivation,[4] one might be skeptical that moral feeling takes no priority over reasoning. Indeed, given the incomparable significance of the four sprouts and moral feelings, Mengzian ethics, it seems to me, is best characterized as emotion-based. The

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[2] *Mengzi* 2A:6 records, "When I say that all men have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others, my meaning may be illustrated thus: even nowadays, if men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they will without exception experience a feeling of alarm and distress. They will feel so, not as a ground on which they may gain the favor of the child's parents, nor as a ground on which they may seek the praise of their neighbors and friends, nor from a dislike to the reputation of having been unmoved by such a thing. From this case we may perceive that the feeling of commiseration is essential to man, that the feeling of shame and dislike is essential to man, that the feeling of modesty and complaisance is essential to man, and that the feeling of approving and disapproving is essential to man" (trans. Legge). In addition, *Mengzi* 6A:7 states: "Thus all things which are the same in kind are like to one another; why should we doubt in regard to man, as if he were a solitary exception to this? The sage and we are the same in kind." (trans. Legge)

[3] *Mengzi* 6A:8 adds: "Therefore, if it receives its proper nourishment, there is nothing which will not grow. If it loses its proper nourishment, there is nothing which will not decay away. Confucius said, 'Hold it fast, and it remains with you. Let it go, and you lose it. Its outgoing and incoming cannot be defined as to time or place.' It is the mind of which this is said!" (trans. Legge)

[4] More on this see sections 1 and 2.

same, however, cannot be said of reasoning. To say that Mengzian ethics is best characterized as reason-based would be an exaggeration.

It seems to me that Wong's account leaves out a possible option, that moral feeling is the measure of reasonableness. On this view, whether one's action/omission is reasonable is determined by the appropriate moral emotion one feels, not the other way around. Consequently, an action, which otherwise would be reasonable, turns out to be unreasonable due to its lack of moral emotion. This view, as I will argue shortly, is endorsed not only by Confucius, but also by Mengzi himself. An illustration will suffice for the present purpose. As is well known, Confucians, and Mengzi included, do not advocate vegetarianism. Enjoying eating meat is not considered by Confucians as a vice. Nonetheless, whether the enjoyment of eating meat is reasonable depends on the situation. And it depends precisely on the moral emotion that one feels when eating meat. As Mengzi said, in 1A:7, having seen animals alive, the morally superior person "cannot bear to see them die; having heard their dying cries, he cannot bear to eat their flesh. Therefore, he keeps away from his slaughter-house and cook-room" (trans. Legge). Generally, eating meat with relish is reasonable and morally appropriate. However, in the case where one has seen animals alive or heard their dying cries, eating meat with relish turns out to be unreasonable and morally inappropriate. Note that it would otherwise be reasonable for the morally superior person to enjoy eating meat, were it not for the unbearable emotion one feels. The reasonableness of eating meat with relish, as has been illustrated in the case, is not determined by the action *per se*. Rather, it is determined by the moral emotion that morally superior persons are feeling when they act.

I remain neutral towards the issue of whether there is a distinction between reason and emotion. Instead of arguing for the dichotomization of reason and emotion, my aim in this paper is more modest. I set out to argue that Mengzian ethics is best characterized as emotion-based. Emotion plays so significant a role not only in moral reasoning but also in moral motivation as well as in moral cultivation. Without emotion's guidance, moral reasoning runs the risk of going astray. Without moral feelings, either one fails to act virtuously or one's motivation to act virtuously is doomed to run out.

In the following sections, I will explore the phenomenon of moral insensitivity from a Confucian perspective. Drawing on three cases of moral insensitivity, one in the *Analects*, the other two in the *Mengzi*, I will argue that Confucian, in particular Mengzian ethics, is properly characterized as emotion-based. The four moral sprouts that Mengzi repeatedly refers to, and the extended moral feelings, are not unintelligent or unreasonable, let alone blind. To be sure, self-conscious reflection, including self-consciously reasoning, has a role to play in Mengzian moral cultivation. Nonetheless, insofar as moral emotion constitutes the source of moral motivation, the foundation of moral knowledge, and the guidance of moral cultivation, Mengzian ethics is distinctly emotion-based. Moral emotion, in the end, is the measure of reasonableness, not the other way around. A morally insensitive person is one who, for the lack of moral feelings, fails to act virtuously in one of the four ways: either he fails to make morally reasonable judgments, or he fails to justify the morally reasonable judgments that he makes, or he fails to act on moral feelings, or he fails to be appropriately guided towards the goal of being virtuous. Moral insensitivity, according to

Mengzi's pathology, is a symptom indicative of the fact that moral feeling, which otherwise would be a natural outgrowth of innate moral sprouts, is inhibited from growing by a variety of factors. These factors include one's misidentifying oneself with mere sensual desires or inclinations; one's being led astray by biased, extravagant or heretical doctrines; and one's cultivation of the moral sprouts in an inadequate way. How to cure people diagnosed with moral insensitivity? Mengzi's therapy is twofold: negatively, one begins by weeding out factors that impede the outgrowth of moral feeling from innate moral sprouts. Positively, one improves one's moral sensitivity by way of extension practice. The case of King Xuan of Qi serves as a nice illustration of Mengzi's therapy.

I. The case of moral insensitivity

Confucians are very much concerned with our underdeveloped moral sense. They are very much concerned with what I dub as "moral insensitivity." To show that this is the case, I draw on three cases, one of which is from the *Analects*, and the other two from the *Mengzi*. Not only for illustrative purpose, these cases also help to shed light on the Confucian view of moral blameworthiness. On this view, wrongdoers are not morally blameworthy merely because their reasoning is flawed. Rather, and more importantly, wrongdoers are morally blameworthy because they are morally insensitive. Moral insensitivity, which causes one's moral reasoning going astray, is what stands in the way of one's becoming virtuous. It follows that one cannot succeed in cultivating oneself without making improvements in one's moral sensibility.

In the *Analects* 17:21, for example, Zai Wo 宰我, a disciple of Confucius, whose literary name is Yu 予, argued against the three years' mourning for parents, and claimed that one year was long enough. Zai Wo said:

> If the superior man abstains for three years from the observances of propriety, those observances will be quite lost. If for three years he abstains from music, music will be ruined. Within a year the old grain is exhausted, and the new grain has sprung up, and, in procuring fire by friction, we go through all the changes of wood for that purpose. After a complete year, the mourning may stop.(trans. Legge)

Confucius asked Zai Wo whether after completing one year's mourning for parents, he would feel at ease in eating good rice and wearing embroidered clothes. By asking the question, Confucius was probably expecting Zai Wo to answer in the negative. To Confucius's surprise, however, Zai Wo replied that he would. The exasperating answer leads Confucius to say:

> If you can feel at ease, do it. But a superior man, during the whole period of mourning, does not enjoy pleasant food which he may eat, nor derive pleasure from music which he may hear. He also does not feel at ease, if he is comfortably lodged. Therefore he does not do what you propose. But now you feel at ease and may do it. (trans. Legge)

After Zai Wo had left, Confucius added:

> How unfeeling Yu is. A child ceases to be nursed by his parents only when he is three years old. Three years' mourning is observed

> throughout the Empire. Was Yu not given three years' love by his parents. (trans. Lau)

According to Confucius, Zai Wo fails to live up to the standard of a virtuous person. And the reason why he falls short of virtue is instructive. On the surface, one year's mourning certainly goes against the mourning ritual that the virtuous ought to observe for their deceased parents. And insofar as Zai Wo fails to observe the three years' mourning that the virtuous would not fail to observe, Zai Wo falls short of virtue.

Note, however, that this is not the way Confucius makes his point. In saying "How unfeeling Yu is," Confucius draws our attention to moral insensitivity that Zai Wo is displaying when his parents' recent death would not decrease his pleasure in eating food and listening to music, nor make him feel ill ease in so doing. Here, Confucius is not so much concerned with Zai Wo's failure to observe the rituals as he is concerned with Zai Wo's failure to have an appropriate moral feeling towards his parents. The facts that Zai Wo fails to feel persistent sorrow and grief for the loss of his parents, and that he feels no gratitude to them for the amount of love and intensive care that he has received since childhood, showcase Zai Wo's lack of virtue.

Note also the role that moral feeling plays in this case. Firstly, when Confucius deplored Zai Wo's unfilial behavior, he was deploring Zai Wo's insufficient love toward his parents. Suppose that Zai Wo, in the absence of filial love for his parents, was somehow motivated to observe the three years' mourning. Even if this were the case, Confucius's remark that "how unfeeling Yu is" would remain true. A person of virtue, instead of having an ulterior

motive, is motivated to act out of genuine moral feeling.[5] The significance of moral feeling for moral motivation, it seems to me, explains in part Confucius's concern with how Zai Wo would feel during the mourning period. After all, as emphasized by Confucius himself, rituals mean much more than the mere external observances of propriety.

> The Master said, "Surely when one says 'The rites, the rites,' it is not enough merely to mean presents of jade and silk. Surely when one says 'Music, music,' it is not enough merely to mean bells and drums." (*Analects* 17:11, trans. Lau)

Secondly, when Zai Wo argued against three years' mourning and maintained that one year was long enough, his concern was mainly with the possible negative effects on the morally superior person. Suppose Zai Wo was not a hypocrite.[6] As Zai Wo identified himself with a morally superior man, he was sincerely worrying about not only the ruins of the rituals but also the collapse of music. At the same time, he was concerned with the significance, for the morally superior, of 'stepping out of the haze and resuming the normal life.' Zai Wo's worries appear to be reasonable. And it is noteworthy that Confucius did not immediately dismiss Zai Wo's concern as unwarranted. Instead of rebutting Zai Wo's argument, Confucius asked Zai Wo to imagine how he would feel during the mourning period. This suggests, it seems to me,

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[5] If this is the case, then Confucius, in contrast to Kant, would not hold that an action is morally worthy if and only if it is done from the pure motive of duty. Confucius would rather hold, it seems to me, that a person of virtue is motivated to act from moral feeling such as love for his family or compassion for people. The same can be said of Mengzi.

[6] In any case, Confucius did not criticize Zai Wo for his hypocrisy. The supposition that Zai Wo is not a hypocrite, instead of weakening Confucius' criticism, sheds further light on the point of his criticism.

that Zai Wo's considerations would otherwise be reasonable, at least relevant, were it not for "how unfeeling Yu is." As Confucius pointed out, a virtuous person, as opposed to Zai Wo, would feel sorrow and grief for the loss of his parents during the three-years period. In light of this fact, it is reasonable to observe the three years' mourning. Ultimately, it is moral feeling, i.e., emotion that a person of virtue would feel, that serves as the measure of reasonableness, and by which the judgement of whether one's action/omission is reasonable can be appropriately made.

In spite of deploring Zai Wo's lack of moral virtue, Confucius does not, in these passages, provide Zai Wo with a therapy to improve his moral sensitivity. One may wonder how Confucius would cure Zai Wo of his underdeveloped moral sense, which will be discussed in the next two subsections. For the moment, we will focus on the significance of moral sensitivity and the problem of moral insensitivity. For that, we find a second example of moral insensitivity in the *Mengzi* 1A:3. When Mengzi saw King Hui of Liang 梁惠王 and said:

> Your dogs and swine eat the food of men, and you do not make any restrictive arrangements. There are people dying from famine on the roads, and you do not issue the stores of your granaries for them. When people die, you say, "It is not owing to me; it is owing to the year." In what does this differ from stabbing a man and killing him, and then saying: "It was not I; it was the weapon?" (trans. Legge)

Here again Mengzi draws our attention to the morally insensitive attitude that King Hui is displaying towards the plight of his subjects. While

people are dying from famine, there are plenty of fat meat in the King's kitchen and fat horses in his stables. King Hui is morally insensitive insofar as he fails to have an appropriate moral feeling, i.e., compassion, for his suffering people. The fact that King Hui is morally insensitive shows he fails to live up to the standard of a virtuous King.

Here is another example from Mengzi. People who initiate the practice of burying wooden images with the dead are severely condemned by Confucius. According to Mengzi (see *Mengzi* 1A:4), this is because the initiators "made the semblances of men, and used them for that purpose." Despite much less sacrifice being made than the practice of burying people alive with the dead, the practice of burying wooden images remains morally intolerable. Why? The reason, as Mengzi rightly points out, is that the wooden images are deliberately made to look like real persons. Were it not for their likeness to real persons, their use would not serve the purpose, i.e., that the wooden images are buried as if persons were buried alive to accompany the dead. In short, the burial of the wooden images is deliberately made, by initiators of the practice, to look like the burial of living persons. Due to their semblances, burying the wooden images is much like burying people alive. The virtuous cannot bear to see the lifelike wooden images be buried as if real persons were buried alive. The virtuous would feel moral repugnance toward such practice no less than toward the practice of burying people alive. The initiators of such practice are morally insensitive insofar as they fail to feel empathy as the virtuous do. And they are morally insensitive to the extent that they find such practice tolerable. Note also that the burial practice of wooden images may appear to be reasonable insofar as it spares

the innocents' life. Indeed, the burial practice of wooden images would otherwise be reasonable were it not for the initiators' insensitivity. A virtuous person, out of moral feeling, would abstain from the burial practice of wooden images. In contrast, due to a lack of moral feeling, the initiators fail to abstain from such practice. The emotion that a person of virtue would have, instead of being made intelligent by reasoning, makes unreasonable the burial practice of wooden images. In the absence of moral feeling, one is likely to be tempted, like those initiators, to think this practice as reasonable.

In sum, Confucians are very much concerned with the phenomenon of moral insensitivity. Typical examples of moral insensitivity can easily be found in Confucian texts, including the case of Zai Wo, King Hui of Liang, and the initiators of the burial practice of wooden images with the dead. A plausible explanation for such concern, it seems to me, lies in the role that moral feeling plays in Confucian ethics. Moral feeling is regarded as the source of moral motivation and as the measure of reasonableness. Lack of moral feeling leads to moral failure, including one's failure to make a distinction between the reasonable and the unreasonable, and one's failure to be efficaciously motivated to act virtuously. Moral feeling, in addition, plays another significant role in Confucian ethics, i.e., it serves to justify moral judgments, and this is part of what it means to say that moral feeling is the measure of reasonableness. Let me explain further with another example.

In *Mengzi* 3A:5, the Mohist Yi Zhi attempted to justify the practice of lavish burial of parents. Traditionally, and in contrast with Confucians, Mohists oppose the practice of lavish burial of parents, and they seek to justify their opposition in terms of the public good. However, the Mohist Yi

Zhi seemed to depart from this Mohist practice–he not only gave his parents lavish burial but also argued for its practice. In 3A:5, Mengzi claimed that Yi Zhi, as a devoted Mohist who accepts the Mohist doctrine of frugal burial, was treating his parents inconsistently when he gave them a lavish burial. Here is what Mengzi said:

> I have heard that Master Yi is a Mohist. In their regulating funerals, Mohists regard frugality as the proper way. Since Master Yi wishes to use this doctrine to change the world, how could he take it to be wrong or worthless? But then Master Yi gave his parents lavish burials. In so doing, he served his parents in a way that he himself disparages. (trans. Shun)

Yi Zhi defended himself by saying:

The Confucians talk about how the ancients treated others 'as if caring for an infant.' What does this saying mean? In my opinion, it means that one should have concern for all without discrimination, though the practice of it starts with one's parents. (trans. Shun)

To this, Mengzi responded:

> Does Yi Zhi really believe that one's affection for one's elder brother's child is just like one's affection for one's neighbor's child? He is drawing upon cases like the following: when an infant crawling about is on the verge of falling into a well, this is not its fault. Moreover Heaven (天) has produced things in such a way that they are single-rooted (一本). And yet Master Yi is dual-rooted (二本),

> and this is the cause of his confusion. Presumably, in ancient times, there were people who did not bury their parents. When their parents died, they carried their bodies and threw them in the gullies. Later, when passing them by, they saw foxes devouring the bodies and flies biting at them. A sweat broke out on their brows, and they could not bear to look. The sweating was not put on for others to see. It was an outward expression of their innermost heart/mind. They went home, came back with baskets and spades, and buried the bodies. If this was really right, then filial sons and benevolent people, in burying their parents, must have tao [the Way].” (trans. Shun, with modification)

As mentioned above, Mohists oppose the practice of lavish burial of parents on the grounds that it is detrimental to the public good. Confucians, in contrast, seek to justify the practice in terms of innate concern for people with distinction, which is rooted in the human mind. In the debate between Mengzi and Yi Zhi, Mengzi began with a thorny question that aims to discourage Yi Zhi from justifying his practice of lavish burial of parents exclusively in terms of the public good. In so doing, Mengzi was trying to push Yi-Zhi into justifying the practice, as Confucians would do, by means of other considerations than the indiscriminate public good. To Mengzi’s surprise, however, although Yi Zhi sought to justify the practice by other considerations than the public good, he did not, as Mengzi’s expectation would have it, appeal to innate concern for people with distinction. Instead, Yi Zhi based his justification on a Confucian saying that seems to advocate indiscriminate concern for people. According to Yi Zhi, if one has concern

for all without discrimination, and if one starts the practice with one's parents, then the public good will be secured rather than ruined. In so doing, Yi Zhi launched a counter-attack against Mengzi. In response, Mengzi called into question Yi Zhi's belief that the Mohist ideal of indiscriminate concern is implicit in Confucian teachings and accused Yi-Zhi of being dual-rooted (indiscriminate public benefit and discriminate concern for one's parents). Confucians, as opposed to Yi Zhi, are single-rooted insofar as their justification of the practice of lavish burial of one's parents is based on one single factor, i.e., the concern for people with distinction that each and every human being is born with.

How should one bury one's parents? Frugally or lavishly? From the Confucian perspective, even though Yi Zhi's judgment that one should bury one's parents lavishly is reasonable, the justification he provides for the judgment, accused by Mengzi as dual-rooted, turns out to be mistaken. It follows that the moral judgment one makes is reasonable is one thing, but whether the justification of the moral judgment is well-grounded is another. Moreover, the presumed origin of the practice of the burial of parents, as pointed out by Mengzi in the passage, traces back to one's inborn discriminate concern for one's parents, i.e., to one's innate moral feeling. This passage, I argue, represents another textual evidence in support of the thesis that, for Mengzi, the justification of moral judgments must be one-rooted, i.e., it must be in terms of moral feeling rather than other impersonal factors. And the same textual evidence in turn supports the thesis that moral feeling is the measure of reasonableness.

In short, moral feeling not only serves to guide one's moral reasoning, but also serves to justify one's moral judgment. Insofar as moral feeling is the measure of reasonableness, but not the other way around, Confucian ethics can properly be characterized as emotion-based. Moral feeling, as I will argue shortly, plays a key role in Mengzian moral cultivation.

II. Mengzi's pathology of moral insensitivity: the role of moral feeling in moral cultivation

When our moral sense remains undeveloped or underdeveloped, we may, under certain circumstances, fail to feel the emotion that a person of virtue should feel. We need to cultivate ourselves in order to feel the same way as the virtuous do. Given that our moral sense, as Mengzi repeatedly points out in reference to the moral sprouts, is innate, the development of our moral sense consists in the natural, as opposed to artificial or forced, growth of the moral sprouts that we are born with. Moral insensitivity is thus a symptom indicative of the fact that our moral feeling, which otherwise would be a natural outgrowth of our inborn moral sprouts, is inhibited by certain factors and fails, as a result, to grow naturally from the moral sprouts.

A number of factors inhibit our moral sprouts from growing into moral feeling. Among them, one factor, probably due to the severity of its bad effect, i.e., dehumanization and the collapse of the morality itself, seems to worry Mengzi the most. We may refer to this factor as being led astray by biased or perverse philosophical doctrines. Biased or perverse teachings delude and mislead us away from the path that the natural growth of our

moral sprouts would otherwise take. Mengzi points out that he does not enjoy debating at all, yet he nonetheless considers debating misleading philosophical doctrines, in particular the most prevalent doctrines of his time such as Mohism 墨家 and Yangism 楊朱學派, as one of his major tasks. Mengzi said in 3B:14:

> Once more, sage sovereigns cease to arise, and the princes of the States give the reins to their lusts. Unemployed scholars indulge in unreasonable discussions. The words of Yang Zhu (楊朱) and Mo Di (墨翟) fill the country. If you listen to people's discourses throughout it, you will find that they have adopted the views either of Yang or of Mo. Now, Yang's principle is "each one for himself," which does not acknowledge the claims of the sovereign. Mo's principle is "to love all equally," which does not acknowledge the peculiar affection due to a father. But to acknowledge neither king nor father is to be in the state of a beast. Gong Meng Yi (公明儀) said, "In their kitchens, there is fat meat. In their stables, there are fat horses. But their people have the look of hunger, and on the wilds there are those who have died of famine. This is leading on beasts to devour men." If the principles of Yang and Mo be not stopped, and the principles of Confucius not set forth, then those perverse speakings will delude the people, and stop up the path of benevolence and righteousness. When benevolence and righteousness are stopped up, beasts will be led on to devour men, and men will devour one another. I am alarmed by these things, and address myself to the defence of the doctrines of the

> former sages, and to oppose Yang and Mo. I drive away their licentious expressions, so that such perverse speakers may not be able to show themselves. Their delusions spring up in men's minds, and do injury to their practice of affairs. Shown in their practice of affairs, they are pernicious to their government. When sages shall rise up again, they will not change my words. (trans. Legge)

Mengzi stresses the importance of understanding words (*zhiyan* 知言) in moral cultivation.[7] The speakers of various stripes whose words are considered by Mengzi as biased or perverse have, it seems to me, one thing in common. That is to say, they all imply that the moral sprouts or moral feeling do not play a significant role in moral cultivation. They all imply, to a greater or lesser extent, that in order to become a person of virtue, one need not grow one's inborn moral sprouts into moral feelings. Depending on the doctrine they embrace, either they deny the existence of innate moral sprouts or they deny that all virtue originates from moral feeling. For example, in the debate between Mengzi and Gaozi 告子 on the issue of whether human nature is good in 6A:1-3, what is at stake is whether the inborn moral sprouts exist at all. In denying human nature is good, Gaozi implies that there is no inborn moral sprout. Relatedly, a second issue is whether benevolence (*ren* 仁) and righteousness (*yi* 義) are artifacts like a cup or a bowl. Here, what is at stake is the origin of virtue. In denying that benevolence or righteousness grows naturally from within the human nature, Gaozi implies that there is no

[7] By "understanding words," Mengzi means"When words are one-sided, I know how the mind of the speaker is clouded over. When words are extravagant, I know how the mind is fallen and sunk. When words are all-depraved, I know how the mind has departed from principle. When words are evasive, I know how the mind is at its wit's end."(*Mengzi* 2A:2) (trans. Legge)

natural virtue. The debate in 6A:4 and 6A:5 between Mengzi and Gaozi on the issue of whether righteousness is external (*yi wai* 義外) invites a variety of interpretations. What remains uncontroversial is that Mengzi argues against Gaozi and insists that the virtue of righteousness, just like the virtue of benevolence, is internal insofar as it originates from the righteous emotion one feels. Thus, according to Mengzi, the virtue of righteousness is no less internal than the virtue of benevolence, contrary to Gaozi's claim that benevolence is internal while righteousness is external (*ren nei yi wai* 仁內義外).

According to Mengzi, all virtues, including benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom, are not only natural but also internal. In the absence of innate moral sprouts, no moral feelings can grow out of them. In the absence of moral feeling, no virtue is possible. The only way to become a person of virtue is to grow one's inborn moral sprouts into moral feelings. Any philosophical doctrine that claims to the contrary is misleading. Thus, on the one hand, the Mohist doctrine that we should love all without distinction misleads the public. The Mohist doctrine goes against our human nature, for we cannot naturally grow our inborn moral sprouts into love without distinction. On the other hand, the Yangist doctrine that we should exclusively love ourselves is misleading as well. This doctrine also goes against our human nature, for we can naturally grow our inborn moral sprouts into love for others.

Compared with other philosophical doctrines, moral emotion seems to be a more reliable guidance on how one can become virtuous. And that is the reason, it seems to me, why Mengzi in 2A:2 disagrees with Gaozi when the latter claims that "what one does not get in words, do not seek in the mind

(*bu de yu yan, wu qiu yu xin* 不得於言，勿求於心)." According to Mengzi, "the function of the mind is to think (*si* 思). By thinking, one gets the right way to guide oneself; by neglecting to think, one fails to do this" (6A:15, my translation). The function of the sense organs is not to think. Rather, it is to see, hear, or smell, etc. Their objects are in the external world, and they tend to be obscured by external objects. The mind, in contrast, has the function to think, including reflection and in particular self-reflection. Contrary to Gaozi, Mengzi holds that what one does not get in words, do seek in the mind. As what has been shown above, the words, provided by philosophers of various stripes, instead of leading one to become virtuous, can lead one astray. In order to avoid misguidance, one needs to reflect on oneself. When one reflects on oneself in due course,[8] one can realize that one is born with the moral sprouts. And if one grows one's inborn moral sprouts naturally without being misguided by the biased or perverse words, one is likely to regain one's lost moral feelings. Learning, as Mengzi said in 6A:11, "is nothing else but to seek for the lost mind" (trans. Legge). Note that thinking in the Mengzian sense is a matter of self-reflection or looking to one's moral emotion for guidance. Thinking, in this sense, is not a matter of reasoning, let alone means-end reasoning or syllogism.

A second factor that inhibits one's moral sprouts from growing into moral feeling is one's insecure material circumstances. Mengzi said in 3A:3,

> The way of the people is this: If they have a certain livelihood, they will have a fixed heart; if they have not a certain livelihood, they

[8] For example, when one, all of a sudden, sees a child about to fall into a well.

> have not a fixed heart. If they have not a fixed heart, there is nothing which they will not do in the way of self-abandonment, of moral deflection, of depravity, and of wild license. (trans. Legge)

As Wong nicely points out, "If people are in circumstances of deprivation such that they must struggle for survival, they cannot be expected to develop their beginnings of virtue" (Wong, 2021: 19). I also agree with Wong when he goes on to say that Mengzi does suggest, in addition, "that even if people have secure material circumstances, they could by their own choice fail to exercise their capacity to *si* 思, to think, and indulge only the small part of themselves. This of course, implicitly, is the case for the kings of Chinese states. They have secure material circumstances, but mostly fail to exercise their capacity to think, or at least the right kind of thinking" (*Ibid.*).

If one indulges only the small part of oneself without exercising one's capacity to self-reflect, one certainly fails to self-reflectively endorse the greater part of oneself, i.e., one's inborn moral sprouts. One's failure to self-reflectively endorse one's inborn moral sprouts in turn explains, as indicated by Mengzi's reply to the questions raised by Gong Du Zi (公都子) in 6A:15, why one fails to become a great person, i.e., a person of virtue. We may refer to this inhibiting factor as one's failure to unify oneself by self-reflectively endorsing one's moral emotion. In the case where one, instead of guiding oneself by self-reflectively endorsing one's moral emotion, is guided by sensual desires or by psycho-physical energy of the body (*qi* 氣), one is led astray and fails to become a great person. As Mengzi claims in 2A:2, "*Zhi* (志) is the leader of *qi*. *Qi* pervades and animates the body. *Zhi* is

first and chief, and *qi* is subordinate to it" (trans. Legge with modification). By *zhi* Mengzi probably means self-reflectively endorsed moral emotion, and *zhi* in this sense indeed is a sure guidance on how to become a person of virtue. However, the fact that *qi* might disturb *zhi* to the extent that it leads one astray does not argue against *qi per se*, it argues rather against *qi*'s being "first and chief". As long as *qi* remains subordinate to *zhi*, the nourishment of *qi* would contribute to a great extent to one's being motivated to act from self-reflectively endorsed moral emotion. Indeed, Mengzi in 2A:2 stresses the importance of nourishing *qi*. As Mengzi claims, being good at nourishing *qi*, he is so determined or so unified that he would no longer be disturbed by *qi* or by various temptations. Unfortunately, not everyone is as determined or unified as Mengzi is. In 6A:9, Mengzi, taking the art of chess-playing as an example, stresses the importance of being mindful or paying attention to what one is learning. Even if one self-reflectively endorses one's moral emotion, one has to be mindful in order not to be distracted from time to time. From a psychological viewpoint, focusing on what one is learning, or maintaining the attention for an extended period of time, involves not just emotion but also cognitive efforts.[9] That cognition has a role to play in moral cultivation should be no surprise to us. As mentioned above, moral cognition is part of what constitutes a full-blown self-cultivation, insofar as moral knowledge is part of what constitutes being virtuous. Indeed, the claim that the Mengzian ethics is emotion-based is compatible with Wong's claim that cognition and emotion are non-dichotomous. Despite their being compatible, the claim that

[9] I am grateful to one referee in this journal for reminding me of this perspective, and for pushing me to reconsider whether the emotion-based account of Mengzian ethics is incompatible with Wong's claim that cognition and emotion are non-dichotomous.

Mengzian ethics is emotion-based has the merit of making it explicit that moral feeling is the measure of reasonableness, not the other way around.

III. Mengzi's cure for moral insensitivity

How to cure morally insensitive people like Zai Wo and King Hui of Liang? Mengzi's therapy consists, negatively, in weeding out the factors that inhibit one's inborn moral sprouts from growing into self-reflectively endorsed moral feeling and, positively, in improving one's moral sensitivity by way of extension (*tui ji* 推及). Indeed, they are two sides of the same coin. The case of King Xuan of Qi turns out to be a nice illustration of Mengzi's therapy, where Mengzi, in the course of conversation with King Xuan, succeeds in figuring out, identifying, and then weeding out those factors that hinder King Xuan from having compassion for his suffering people. In addition, he urges King Xuan to practice extension. The passages in the text indicates that King Xuan, probably affected by the biased or perverse words from his courtiers, believes falsely that he, as a king, should have Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 and Duke Wen of Jin 晉文公 as his role models; that he is unable to become a virtuous king; and that were he to become a virtuous king, he would not gratify his most eager desire. As Mengzi makes it clear that King Xuan wishes to enlarge his territories, to have Qin 秦 and Chu 楚 wait at his court, to rule the Middle Kingdom, and to have the barbarous tribes that surround it pay homage to him.

To be sure, King Xuan has secure material circumstances and he need not struggle for survival. However, he fails to exercise his capacity to reflect,

in particular to reflect on his own inborn moral sprouts. He fails, moreover, to self-reflectively endorse his moral emotion. He fails to let *zhi* command *qi*. Lastly, he fails to nourish his *qi* and to remain mindful. These factors jointly inhibit the King from growing the moral sprouts into self-reflectively endorsed and motivationally efficacious moral emotion.

Mengzi asks King Xuan to practice extension in the expectation that he will become a virtuous king, that is to say, that he will have compassion toward his subjects and implement benevolent government. One question arises: How is the Mengzian extension supposed to proceed? The extension, I argue, consists in improving one's moral sensitivity, and as a consequence, in adding to one's moral motivation. The way it proceeds is as follows: from paradigm cases, where one is morally sensitive and well-motivated, to cases where one remains morally insensitive and insufficiently motivated. In the case of King Xuan, for example, extension proceeds from a paradigm case, where King Xuan not only feels compassion toward an ox to be sacrificed for the consecration of a new bell but is also well-motivated, out of his compassion, to spare its death, to the case where the King remains not only morally insensitive (feeling no compassion for his subjects) but is also insufficiently motivated. The Mengzian extension lies in enlarging, so to speak, one's "morally sensitive zone." The more one succeeds in enlarging one's morally sensitive zone, the better one is morally motivated, and the more virtuous one is expected to become. Needless to say, the Mengzian extension cannot even get off the ground without the elimination of the above-mentioned inhibiting factors.

It is noteworthy that when one improves one's moral sensitivity by way of extension, the moral emotion one feels may not remain intact from paradigm

to non-paradigm case. The moral feeling may undergo transformation in terms of the context and the object toward which one's moral feeling is directed. In the case of King Xuan, for example, his compassion toward the ox in the paradigm case may differ, not only in strength but also in nature, from his compassion for his subjects, insofar as his practice of extension is successful. Such a reading of how extension proceeds in nature and in degree is in better agreement with Mengzi's view, as evidenced by *Mengzi* 7A:45, where Mengzi said:

> In regard to inferior creatures, the superior man is kind to them, but not loving. In regard to people generally, he is loving to them, but not affectionate. He is affectionate to his parents, and lovingly disposed to people generally. He is lovingly disposed to people generally, and kind to creatures. (trans. Legge)

Likewise, when one extends reverence that one feels toward the elders in one's own family to the elders in the families of others, or when one extends kindness that one feels for the young in one's own family to the young in the families of others (*lao wu lao yi ji ren zhi lao, you wu you yi ji ren zhi you* 老吾老以及人之老，幼吾幼以及人之幼), such reverence or kindness may vary, both in degree and in nature, from the paradigm to non-paradigm case. As a result, a successful extension is no argument for the Mohist ideal of love without distinction.

To be sure, only regular practice makes perfect extension. One cannot expect to achieve big success in a short period of time. For extension to succeed, one should start with easier cases, i.e., the cases which are analogical

to the paradigm case, including the situations where it is easier for one to learn how to be empathetic. One cannot overnight become morally sensitive by way of one single practice. One can only improve one's moral sensibility through regular and constant practice of extension. Unfortunately, insufficient practice of extension on the part of King Xuan impedes his improvement in the cultivation of moral feelings.

IV. Conclusion

Wong's argument against either the purely logical or the purely emotive extension interpretation of the Mengzian and Confucian moral extension is convincing. And his support for the third alternative, the "developmental extension" interpretation, is reasonable. According to the "developmental extension" account that Wong has developed, the dichotomization of reason and emotion is unwarranted. Reasoning and feeling interact and interweave to the extent that feeling becomes morally intelligent, and reasoning becomes motivationally efficacious. And this is precisely, he argues, what Mengzi is trying to do with King Xuan in 1A:7.

I agree with Wong that cognition certainly plays a role in moral cultivation. However, I remain neutral towards the issue of whether reasoning and emotion are non-dichotomous. Drawing on the phenomenon of moral failure due to moral insensitivity, I argue instead that Mengzian ethics is best characterized as emotion-based. Moral reasoning, without emotion's guidance, runs the risk of going astray, as shown in the cases of moral insensitivity, including Zai Wo, King Hui of Liang, and the initiators of the burial practice

of wooden images with the dead. The justification of moral judgments, if not based on the inborn moral feelings, runs the risk of being mistaken, as shown in the case of the Mohist Yi Zhi. Moral emotion is the measure of reasonableness, not the other way around. The fact that moral emotion plays so significant a role not only in moral reasoning but also in moral motivation and moral cultivation leads me to conclude that Mengzian ethics is distinctly emotion-based. To show how the Mengzian extension is supposed to proceed, I draw on the idea of moral insensitivity and argue that it begins, negatively, by weeding out various factors that inhibit one from acting out of self-reflectively endorsed moral emotion, and, positively, by improving one's moral sensitivity through increasingly enlarging one's sensitivity zone.

Despite my disagreement with Wong on some points, Wong's scholarly work has been tremendously helpful to my understanding of Mengzi. And I am confident that Wong's interpretation of Mengzi is, and will be, a source of inspiration, not only for me but also for many other readers.

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Commentary on Rong-Lin Wang's "Moral Sensitivity, Emotion-Based Theory of Ethics, and Confucian Moral Psychology"

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I thoroughly enjoyed Dr. Rong-Lin Wang's paper and have learned a great deal from his thoughtful and meticulous analysis of David Wong's (a well-known professor of philosophy at Duke University) interpretation of Mengzi's Confucian ethics and moral psychology, and his own construction of an emotion-based Confucian virtue ethics.

In contrast with reason-based moral models, Professor Wang argues that from the perspective of Confucian ethics (in particular as expounded and articulated in the *Mengzi* 《孟子》(the *Book of Mencius*) the extension of moral feeling or emotion is absolutely essential for the personal cultivation of virtue. Moreover, such an extension is foundational and fundamental to what counts as "acting morally" in Confucian morality. Based on this reading of Confucian ethics, he further argues that while David Wong's rejection of dichotomized interpretations of "moral extension"—either the "purely logical

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extension" (favoring reason, in alliance with Kant) or the "purely emotive extension" (favoring emotion, in alliance with Hume)—to be one-sided and foreign to Confucian ethics is correct, Wong missed the mark when he advances the following two claims. (a) In Confucian ethics, reasoning is a necessary pre-condition for the full development of one's moral feeling. Without "reason," Confucian moral feeling would become unintelligent or at least would fall short of being capable of functioning as a guide for moral life. And, (b) Confucian ethics endorses a non-dichotomized interpretation of the mutual complementarity of reason and emotion without giving priority to either reason or emotion.

In Dr. Wang's view, based on textual evidence from both the *Analects* and the *Book of Mencius*, moral emotion/feeling plays an unsurpassed role in Confucian ethics. Moral feeling, therefore, has both a temporal priority and a normative priority to moral reasoning. In other words, moral feeling and moral sensitivity must take place first and are the measurement of moral reasonableness rather than the reverse. Thus, Confucian ethics is best classified as an emotively-based virtue ethics—not that it devalues reason, but in the sense that moral sensitivity is both the very basis and the added luster of moral reasonableness. Dr. Wang has made convincing arguments in his paper and I agree with his analysis on many fronts. Furthermore, based on the non-dualistic approach to moral feeling and reasoning in Chinese thought, I would also suggest that the Chinese character *xin* (心) is best translated as "heart-mind" or "to feel-think at the same time" rather than simply as "mind" as it has appeared a few times in the paper.

My following questions deal more with my desire to learn more about some of the fine points that Dr. Wang is making and suggesting further refinement of some parts of the paper rather than raising any serious objections to his thesis.

1. In the beginning of the paper, Dr. Wang quoted a text from *Mengzi* 1A:7, which reported that King Xuan of Qi 齊宣王 replaced a sacrificial ox with a lamb, due to his compassion that he cannot bear to see a ritual ox shivering with fear on its way to be slaughtered. But what is the difference between using an ox versus using a lamb in the moral cultivation of expanding one's moral feeling? Both ox and lamb are comparable in their physical size and are animals capable of suffering. Similarly, what is the difference between sparing one human life by taking another's in cultivating moral sensitivity? Are there texts in the *Mengzi* or in the classic commentarial tradition that address this?

2. In the article, Dr. Wang has suggested two Confucian methods that can help remove obstacles that would otherwiseblock the natural development of innate rudimentary moral feelings/sprouts. The first method is to remove misleading doctrines, and the second method is to prevent deprivation of the material well-being necessary for a secure livelihood because people would not have a secure mind without a secure livelihood, and to ask people who suffer from extreme poverty and displacement to act morally is inhumane (*Mengzi* 3A:3). On this account, my two follow-up questions are as follows:

(2.1) Regarding the first method of removing misleading doctrines, Dr. Wang enumerated the Yangzhu School 楊朱學派 (what may be called the Egoism School) and the Mohist School 墨家 (what is called the School of

Universal Love without distinction—it shares some similar traits with Utilitarianism in the Western traditions). It's easy to understand that an egoistic philosophy is rejected because it abandons and suffocates innate moral sprouts that humans are born with, and consequently the potential for the development of essential Confucian virtues such as humaneness (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 義), ritual propriety (*li* 禮), and wisdom (*zhi* 智) in favor of one's own egotistic desires and benefits. It is unclear, however, how the Mohist idea of universal love and altruism (perhaps to an extreme) commits the same fault of suffocating these moral sprouts. It seems to me that the Mohist School's fault is of a different kind. That is, it is its extreme altruism, which *overly* extends one's innate moral feelings,that is inhumane. Thus, the critique of these two schools should be separate. I wonder how Dr. Wang thinks about this.

(2.2) I also wonder whether there is a third factor that impedes the natural development of moral feelings in a person other than the aforementioned two factors. Namely, the influence of the social environment, conventions, and habits. Consider, for example, 6A:8 in the *Mengzi*, the metaphor of Niu Mountain 牛山:

> Mencius said, "The trees of Niu Mountain were once beautiful. But can the mountain be regarded any longer as beautiful since, being in the borders of a big state, the trees have been hewed down with axes and hatches? Still with the rest given them by the days and nights and the nourishment provided them by the rains and the dew, they were not without buds and sprouts springing forth. But then the cattle and

> the sheep pastured upon them once and again. That is why the mountain looks so bald. When people see that it is so bald, they think that there was never any timber on the mountain. Is this the true nature of the mountain? Is there not [also] a heart of humanity and righteousness originally existing in [human beings]? The way in which [they] lose [their] originally good mind is like the way in which the trees are hewed down with axes and hatchets. As trees are cut down day after day, can a mountain retain its beauty? To be sure, the days and nights do the healing, and there is the nourishing air of the calm morning which keeps [them] normal in [their] likes and dislikes. But the effect is slight, and is disturbed and destroyed by what [they do] during the day. When there is repeated disturbance, the restorative influence of the night will not be sufficient to preserve (the proper goodness of the mind). (Chan, 1973: 56)

This passage may also shed further light on the connection between *zhi* 志 (volition, will) and *qi* 氣 (psycho-physical energy in a person), and the problem of moral weakness/habit that is socially induced. In such cases, social habits/conventions become inculcated as personal habits. For example, in a society that is habitually discriminatory against the poor, a particular social class, or a certain ethnic group, and so on, it will be difficult for an individual to break out that cultural ethos and to develop their moral sensitivity fully so as to extend it to all without prejudice.

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Reply to Professor Pang-White's Commentary

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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 obtrude 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.