

THE
PHILOSOPHICAL
CHALLENGE
FROM
CHINA



EDITED BY
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2 Growing Virtue: The Theory and Science of Developing Compassion from a Mencian Perspective

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1 A Concrete Basis for a Relationship among Reflection, Deliberation, Emotion, and Desire

In this chapter I shall reflect on the implications of Mencius' (fourth century BCE) conception of compassion for one of the most important problems that defines the Western philosophical tradition: the relationship between reason on the one hand and desire and emotion on the other, especially in the development of moral character. The mainstream of Western philosophy and psychology has assumed a split between reason on the one hand and emotion and desire on the other, along with the claim that one is or should be dominant over the other. It is difficult to underestimate the multiple and profound ramifications of this split. We have only to look at the way Kant and Hume shaped the Western philosophical tradition on the subjects of moral motivation and the development of character. The contemporary debate still shows the Kantian-Humean divide in those who give exclusive or primary emphasis to reason as the basis for moral knowledge and (morally appropriate) motivation¹ and in those who give exclusive or primary emphasis to emotion and desire (with reason playing the role of servant or slave, gathering information as to how to fulfill the ends set by emotion and/or desire).²

The debate has often proceeded as if there were only two possibilities. I have argued in the past³ that Mencius' conception of the moral sprouts and their development into the ethical virtues bears on the Western problem. It helpfully undermines the categorical distinction between reason and emotion. To say more positively and more clearly what should replace that categorical distinction, however, is not so easy. Though I still stand behind much of what I have said, I have never been entirely satisfied with it. I return to the subject here and try to articulate more clearly and with more specificity what philosophers working within the Western tradition could learn from the *Mencius* text (fourth to third centuries BCE), drawing from some contemporary scientific studies to support my suggestions that this text provides fruitful directions of thought.⁴ Relative to mainstream Western philosophy, contemporary

psychology and neuroscience are opening up a richer set of possibilities for the relationship among reflection, deliberation, emotion, and desire in ways that resonate with early Confucian philosophy.

This surprising convergence has several causes. First, the early Confucians held themselves accountable to a broad range of pre-theoretical experience of the moral life. Second, they set themselves the task of specifying in fairly concrete terms *how* actual human beings could cultivate themselves so as to realize the ideal of the exemplary moral person (the *junzi* 君子).⁵ This emphasis on the pre-theoretical and the practical led to insights that correspond to conclusions that contemporary psychologists and neuroscientists have drawn from an intriguing and increasingly rich array of experimental evidence on emotion and cognition in general and in the moral life in particular. Third, the early Confucians, as part of a more general tradition of early Chinese thought, tended to take a more relational approach in trying to understand something: they tend to highlight a thing's relationships to other things and to the environment, rather than looking purely to its internal structure. They tend to understand themselves and other human beings as organic systems taking sustenance from and depending on larger surrounding environmental systems, and insights stemming from this outlook resonate with contemporary scientific theorizing about the development of unlearned traits as an organism interacts with its environment. Fourth, because they were used to thinking of mind and body as continuous and not of radically different kinds, Chinese thinkers were able to see that thinking, feeling, and sensing with the body are intimately connected. Some of the most intriguing contemporary psychology and neuroscience points in the same direction.

From here on, I shall avoid talk of "reason" except for discussing the views of Western philosophers. This is to avoid the implication that there was widespread belief in Chinese philosophy in "reason" as a unified entity. I see little to recommend such an attribution. What we encounter are references to forms of reflection and reasoning that influence and are influenced by forms of desire and affective processes. Pointing to some discussions in the *Mencius* and relating them to some contemporary scientific study of cognition and emotion, I shall argue for taking a more particularized and differentiated approach to the phenomena that we tend to obscure by using the word "reason." By contrast, contemporary Western philosophers and many psychologists continue a tendency to construe reason, desire, and emotion in dichotomous and overgeneralized terms to this day. Though I shall use the words "desire" and "emotion" in discussing the Chinese texts (because there are corresponding Chinese terms that are sufficiently similar in meaning), I shall also argue that we need to take a more particularized and discriminating approach to the phenomena covered by these terms. At the end, I shall discuss what I believe are some limitations in Mencius' approach and then gesture to the ways that the *Analects* and the *Xunzi* indicate ways the early Confucian tradition pointed beyond Mencius' limitations.

2 Components of the Sprout of Compassion

Mencius is concerned to identify the inborn beginnings of morality in *ren xing* 人性, commonly translated as “human nature.” I shall adopt that common translation here, with a nuanced gloss that Kwong-loi Shun has suggested: “certain characteristic features of human beings that are particularly conspicuous, pervasive, and difficult to alter, without necessarily having the connotation of what is essential as opposed to accidental.”⁶ I add the gloss because, with Roger Ames,⁷ I believe that the Chinese tendency to see things in relational and dynamic terms is not congenial to thinking of things as having essential properties. Such a dynamic conception of human nature is illustrated below by the discussion of Mencius’ sprout metaphor for the development of the moral virtues. The beginnings of the virtues in human nature are sprout-like in the sense that they take shape only if there is significant nurturing of them within the right sort of social environment and conditions of sufficient material security.

These beginnings are the *duan* 端, translatable as “beginnings,” “germs,” or “sprouts,” and used in 2A6 to refer to the four *xin* 心 (hearts or feelings) that can develop into ethical virtues: compassion can develop into *ren* 仁 (human-heartedness); shame/dislike can develop into *yi* 義 (as a virtue of persons, translatable as “righteousness” but with some infelicity for conveying its meaning as the ability to grasp and act on rightness or appropriateness to the situation as a property of actions); deference can develop into *li* 禮 (observing ritual propriety); and approval/disapproval can develop into *zhi* 智 (wisdom). Three of these sprouts are or include emotions—compassion, dislike/shame, and deference. Most of the *Mencius*’ most provocative discussion of the ways that reflection and emotion interact in moral development concerns compassion, so I will focus on that sprout.⁸

What is the sprout of compassion like? In this section, I have laid out some preliminary characterizations. Subsequent characterizations in the next sections will focus on individual components of the emotion. I shall then go on to discuss how the components change as compassion grows into the virtue of *ren*. In 2A6 it is the phrase “*ceyin zhi xin*” 惻隱之心 that is usually translated as the “heart” (or feeling) of compassion.” Mencius uses this phrase, and another for compassion, “*bu ren ren zhi xin*” 不忍人之心 (in context, it can be translated as “the heart (or feeling) that is unable to bear the suffering of others”). Mencius supports his attribution of this sprout to all human beings by giving the example of the alarm and distress (*chuti ceyin zhi xin* 怵惕惻隱之心) that anyone would feel upon seeing a child about to fall into a well. He emphasizes that there is no ulterior motive for this reaction: not the desire to get in good with the child’s parents, not the desire for good reputation among one’s neighbors, and not dislike of the child’s cries. Mencius’ 2A6 example implies that compassion can be felt for any human being (the child need not be a relative), and

it can be felt for animals.⁹ Mencius also holds that unlearned concern for the welfare of one's family is and should be stronger than one's concern for non-related others¹⁰ and that it has a foundational role in the development of *ren* as human-heartedness.¹¹

The compassion in Mencius' example has four components: a cognitive component of recognizing that a child is about to befall harm; a bodily visceral response that might involve catching one's breath, one's heart rate quickening, and perhaps reflexive movement toward the child; a motivational component that consists of concern for the child or a desire that harm not befall her (the motivational component overlaps with the visceral response insofar as it is a response that prepares one to act); and the "feeling" of the emotion itself, the felt alarm and distress that in this case has a visceral tone to it in the way that fear for someone whose welfare one values can grip the body.

2.1 The Bodily Component: *Qi* and Mind-Body Unity

Antonio Damasio has suggested that subjective feeling is constituted by the mental states arising from the neural representation of various changes occurring within the chemical landscape of the body.¹² These changes are responses to a precipitating event or stimulus and include those that ready one for action. Mencius is in an excellent position to acknowledge that the subjective feeling of an emotion can be bodily feeling. A general understanding of Mencius' time is that the person is constituted by *qi* 氣, an animating and elemental energy-stuff with psycho-physical characteristics. As Alan Chan remarks, there is little reason not to believe that Mencius shared with his contemporaries this general understanding of the person.¹³ *Qi* fills the body, and the heart-mind is an organ of the body.¹⁴ The heart-mind has the function of thinking and feeling, and its workings are enabled by the person's *qi*. There is no Cartesian problem of explaining causal interaction between substances that have nothing in common with one another. The energy-stuff of *qi* is a *psycho-physical* stuff. Emotions arise from different kinds of *qi*.¹⁵

Given common views of human *qi* of Mencius' time, it is reasonable to attribute to him the view that liking (*hao* 好) and disliking (*wu* 惡) are the most basic forms of cognitive-affective tendencies that arise from a person's *qi*.¹⁶ They are basic in that liking gives rise to pleasure, and disliking gives rise to sorrow or anger. Anger in fact was conceived as a kind of rising-up of a person's *qi* (perhaps awareness of this rising up was thought to be the feeling component), and the alarm and painful feeling that can accompany compassion is another kind of *qi* and our awareness of it.

The bodily nature of compassion receives some confirmation from recent investigations into the neuroscience of compassion. Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and her colleagues conducted brain imaging studies on subjects they had exposed to true stories.¹⁷ Some stories were selected to evoke admiration of morally virtuous behavior

or for morally neutral skill; others were selected to evoke compassion for someone suffering physical pain (sustained through physical injury) or for someone suffering psychological/social pain (e.g., grief, despair, social rejection). The results of the imaging studies indicated that regulatory neural mechanisms responsible for sensing and regulating body functions and known to be engaged in “basic” emotions such as fear, anger, and sadness are also engaged in the experience of admiration and compassion.

2.2 The Motivational Component: *Qi* as Motivational Energy

Consider the aspect of emotion that is readiness to act. *Qi* supplies a person with motivational energy. In 2A2, Mencius notes that the heart-mind is the commander of the *qi*. It forms aims (*zhi* 志), and when these are focused or concentrated (*yi* 壹),¹⁸ the *qi* follows and manifests as movement of the body. However, Mencius goes on to note, the *qi* when concentrated can in turn move the heart-mind’s aims. That is, the energy-stuff of *qi* can gather so as to influence the heart-mind in the aims or directions it takes. Thus, the conception of the person as constituted by *qi* underlies not only the feeling component but also the motivational component.

For Mencius, the *qi* of human beings tends to flow in certain directions. Some of these directions correspond to the motivational directions embedded in the sprouts. In 6A7, Mencius says that just as meat pleases (*yue* 悅) people’s mouths, *li* 理 (pattern)¹⁹ and *yi* (rightness/righteousness) pleases their heart-minds. The inborn motivational directionality in the sprout of compassion lies in concern for the suffering other. It involves dislike for the suffering of others. Mencius conceives this dislike of suffering with interesting nuance. In the 1A7 story of King Xuan and the ox, the king decides to spare an ox being led to ritual slaughter because the ox’s fear reminded him of an *innocent* man going to execution. In 3A5, Mencius, in dialogue with the Mohist Yi Zhi, again returns to his example of a child about to fall into a well, and this time implies that a relevant feature of the appropriate response to it lies in its *innocence*: it is not the child’s fault, he says, that it is about to fall into the well. Thus, the dislike that goes into the sprout of compassion is a dislike for the suffering of innocents, those who do not deserve to suffer.

It might appear that in incorporating a significant role for innocence in the matter of whose suffering prompts compassion, Mencius is reading way too much cognitive sophistication into the structure of what is supposed to be an unlearned emotional disposition in human nature, but we should rethink this reaction in light of studies conducted by the psychologist Paul Bloom and his colleagues on infants (three- to twelve-months old). They exposed their infant subjects to shows featuring pro-social or anti-social creatures (blocks with “googly eyes” who helped or hindered other blocks with eyes trying to get up a hill; puppets who performed helping or hindering actions toward other puppets, e.g., trying to open a box). In this age range the experimenters

found preferences in the infants (as evidenced by looking longer at them or by reaching for them) for helpers of third parties unrelated to the infants.²⁰ Even more surprising, eight-month-old infants selectively prefer characters who act positively toward pro-social individuals and characters who act negatively toward antisocial individuals. Additionally, young toddlers direct positive behaviors toward pro-social others and negative behaviors toward antisocial others.²¹ They did not have any of these differential preferences when shown similar scenarios but with "inanimate" individuals (blocks *without* googly eyes, for example).

Given the age of the subjects, of course, this is extremely suggestive of unlearned dispositions not only to like others who help others and to dislike those who hinder others, but to like those who reward helpers and those who punish hinderers. Could this reflect, then, not only the sprout of an urge to be concerned about others but also the sprout of being able to discriminate "guilty" anti-social actors from the "innocent"? There is no doubt that culture and individual learning experiences play an irreplaceable role in the ability of matured human beings to make the familiar nuanced moral judgments that form the grist for moral philosophy, but Bloom's studies of infants seem to suggest that we might be *biologically prepared* to develop in certain directions which support our ability to engage in the intricate interdependencies of human social life. Infants might even be prepared to make relatively sophisticated discriminations not only in service of approving helping actions and attitudes (they even seem capable of discriminating between those who try to help but fail and those who do not try at all), but also those who support helping actions and attitudes and those who do not.

One more point about the motivational nature of the sprout needs to be made. The motivational elements need not and typically do not dictate specific action tendencies. In Mencius' example of the reaction to the child in peril, the response is characterized only as the alarm and distress, not the actual act of trying to save the child. Emotions do not always result in overt actions, for one thing, because they can be overridden by other emotions or interests a person has. Furthermore, even if one wanted to act from an emotion, the specific nature of such action would depend on the circumstances. My first reaction to the child crawling toward the well may be to rush over and grab it, but I may be too far away to get there in time, and my best action may be to shout to others closer to the child.

It is not uncommon for the contemporary scientific literature to mention "action tendencies" as components of emotions, especially those "basic" emotions such as fear, anger, and sadness that appear to have a very substantial biological basis and look to be universal or nearly so. The behavioral component of fear, for example, is often characterized as "flight," and very often this is the behavioral response. But freezing is not an infrequent response. Furthermore, human beings can fear a wide variety of things, and some of these things simply don't elicit flight as an appropriate

or expected response: consider fear of losing one's youthful vigor motivating a man to buy a shiny red sports car.²² What is appropriate or likely as a response depends on the situation, the character of the object of the emotion, and what is at stake for the person who experiences the emotion.

At the same time that we recognize emotions as not necessarily including any specific action tendencies, we note that they do act as an impetus for action of some kind (even freezing in the face of fear is a kind of behavioral response). The role of emotion in the production of action is real and crucial, but it is typically more complicated than is often recognized. Because emotions often involve visceral bodily changes, they can ready us for action. Because we feel our emotions and because they do not dictate specific actions, we have the flexibility to shape what actions satisfy the relevant motivations according to the situation. Part of what culture does is to provide us scripts for satisfying these motivations given certain kinds of situations. But individual learning, personality, goals, and reflection and deliberation also go into shaping what specific actions emerge from our emotions.

2.3 The Cognitive Component: Recognizing Patterns of Suffering

Unlearned compassion involves the cognitive abilities to discriminate those who are suffering or in danger of suffering. And as just discussed, there is evidence of ways in which the motivational component of natural compassion involves the beginnings of sophisticated discriminations among the potential recipients of the emotion. The motivational structure intertwines with the cognitive component, since part of the latter just is the capacity to make discriminations. To be able to properly dislike suffering in others and to be able to properly like the sparing of suffering in others, or to be able to properly dislike those who hinder helpers and to be able to properly like those who help helpers, one must discriminate the corresponding *li* (patterns—in this case that constitute who is a helper and who is a hinderer and patterns that constitute who helps helpers and who hinders helpers).²³ The differential motivational responses that seem to be the beginnings of approach or avoidance depend on such discrimination of patterns.

The cognitive component need not deliver judgments or beliefs in any full-blooded sense. A child can feel alarm and distress over a favorite doll's broken arm. She may perceive the doll to be suffering; but does she believe it? Such phenomena indicate that the cognitive component can sometimes remain at the level of "seeing something *x* as if it were *y*" that precedes and often, but not always, turns into belief.²⁴ The phrase "*x* as if it were a *y*" is neutral as to whether *x* really is a *y*. This capacity to see something in terms of something else allows us to entertain possibilities without fully committing to their reality. The capacity to see in terms of analogy, to see something in terms of something else based on similarities between the two, is fundamental to human cognition.²⁵ It is used to understand one less intelligible or accessible realm of

experience in terms of another more intelligible or accessible realm (consider the analogy of billiard balls in motion to explain molecular or atomic motion; or the analogy of the computer to explain the workings of the mind). It is used in persuasion and argument ("Afghanistan is no place for the United States to be; it's another Vietnam"). Because this sort of cognitive strategy for making sense of the world is so basic to human life, it is plausible that the wiring for such a capacity might be set up so that much of our seeing something as another thing is non-conscious and automatic, but could have been even more adaptive for this capacity to be able to take sophisticated and reflective forms, whereby one can deliberate over whether *x* is sufficiently similar to past instances of *y*'s so as to justify turning the seeing of *x* as a *y* into a warranted judgment.

The "seeing as" character of the cognitive component relates to the possibility of emotions being warranted or unwarranted. We distinguish at least some of the major kinds of emotion on the basis of the kind of appraisals they involve: the "seeing as" of emotion typically involves seeing something as having evaluative significance for the perceiver. Fear involves seeing something as posing danger or anticipated harm either to oneself or to someone one identifies with or has concern for. Jealousy in love involves seeing another as a rival for the affections of one's beloved. One can certainly have the relevant perceptions without having sufficient warrant for them.

This is why, in development of compassion from its unlearned form, judgments can enter into the emotion. One might judge one's initial perception of someone as suffering or not suffering to be mistaken upon further inquiry into the situation. One comes to "reappraise" the situation consciously and reflectively, even if one's initial appraisal of the situation was automatic and non-conscious. Furthermore, the *kind* of suffering for which one can have compassion might make a difference as to the cognitive resources one needs to draw upon. Immordino-Yang and her colleagues²⁶ found that compassion for another's social and psychological pain corresponded to somewhat different processes in the brain than compassion for another's physical pain. The former involved high levels of activity in brain areas associated with introspection, reflection on the self, and taking the perspectives of others.²⁷ The processing of information also took longer in the case of compassion for social and psychological pain.²⁸ The implication is that seeing someone as suffering social or psychological pain takes considerable cognitive development and learning. More instances of compassion for such pain probably involve explicit judgment and inference, and give us more opportunities for conscious reappraisal of the situation.

How cognitive is the cognitive component? Some philosophers and psychologists will put up considerable resistance to calling an automatic and non-conscious ability to discriminate a "cognitive" ability. To say that someone has made a judgment is to imply some degree of conscious consideration. But there need be nothing consciously considered or deliberated about the alarm and distress one feels at seeing a child about

to fall into a well. The alarm and distress simply happen to us and displays "automaticity," to use the contemporary psychological term that connotes lack of cognitive control. If one associates the cognitive with the higher processes of conscious reflection and deliberation, then one will reject the idea that there is anything cognitive about unlearned compassion.

To some extent, this is a matter of what people choose to call "cognitive." If one insists that the label applies only to that which is conscious, deliberated and subject to assessment and cognitive control (e.g., such that assessing the lack of evidence for it results in lack of belief in it), then of course the spontaneous and automatic expressions of unlearned compassion cannot be regarded as having a cognitive element. Alternatively, the label can be defined much more broadly to include whatever is represented in some way, not necessarily to conscious awareness, such that it bears an appraisal of the situation that has affective meaning for the person.²⁹ There need be no substantive disagreement as long as we agree on what is there in unlearned compassion, apart from what we choose to call it.

I opt for the more inclusive meaning of *cognitive*, because it correctly suggests an important *continuity* between the initial pre-belief, perceptual, non-conscious and automatic appraisals of a situation by an agent and subsequent cognitive reappraisals that occur within an emotion as it stretches out over time, when reflection on what one initially feels may bring initial appraisals under cognitive assessment and some degree of cognitive control. Much of the early scientific study of emotion focused only on initial emotional episodes of emotions such as fear and anger, in which the appraisals of something as dangerous or offensive could very well be fast, automatic, and non-conscious.³⁰ In fact, these approaches to emotion simply continue the Western tradition of cleaving it from various forms of reflection and deliberation.

But at least some psychologists³¹ have come to recognize that what is amenable to controlled experiment may occlude some of the most important emotional phenomena, such as the fact that we can reappraise objects about which we have made automatic and non-conscious appraisals. Take an instance in which one flares with anger at being ignored by an acquaintance. This reaction makes emotional sense only in relation to goals or desires to be treated in certain ways, certain *likes* and *dislikes*. In the next moment, however, one can catch oneself reacting in this way, reflect and identify the cause, and wonder why one should care about being treated that way by the callow person one knows the other to be, and the anger subsides.

There is a deeper point to be made against the Western philosopher's cleavage between the non-conscious and automatic on the one hand and the controlled and reflective on the other hand, as if these were two separate realms that influence human action. The cleavage obscures the way that the controlled and reflective must inevitably be built upon our automatic and non-conscious discrimination of patterns in the environment. As has become increasingly clear, the limited size of our working

memories requires that most of the information-processing done by the mind must be done at the non-conscious level. At the conscious level, we bring up (or at least try to) some of what we have processed at the lower level, "as needed" for reappraisal and more complex processing and weighing.

Moreover, a recent psychological study indicating causal influence of the slow and reflective over the automatic and non-conscious discrimination of patterns suggests that we should re-examine the very distinction between automatic and controlled processing. Lisa Barrett, Kevin Ochsner, and James Gross summarize the studies that break down the distinction into different dimensions of automaticity and control.³² For example, much of the earlier work operationalized automaticity by reference to the subjective feeling of the agent that he lacked control over his emotional response to a stimulus. The subjective feeling of lacking control, however, can co-exist with the internally represented goal states of the agent influencing which aspects of a situation are attended to and processed. The goals of an agent may also motivate not only reappraisal of an emotional object but an initial fast and non-conscious appraisal. Goal-directed focusing of attention in appraisal or reappraisal is a very important kind of controlled process, even if the agent has no subjective feeling of controlling her attention in accordance with her goals. What this implies, in other words, is that there is bidirectional causal influence between automatic and non-conscious appraisals and controlled, reflective appraisals and goals that people consciously reflect on and adopt.³³

One striking possible instance of reflective processes influencing automatic non-conscious appraisals and responses to events is the surprising finding that older adults have fewer negative emotions than younger adults. It is surprising in light of the fact that they have the end of life "in view" while younger adults typically see the end in the distant horizon. Mara Mather and Laura Carstensen survey relevant studies and conclude that the older adults focus more on emotional self-regulation as a goal.³⁴ They are less likely to react to upsetting interpersonal situations by shouting or name-calling, and experience negative affect for shorter periods of time. In terms of what they pay attention to in a situation, they pretty much live according to the Harold Arlen-Johnny Mercer song, accentuating the positive and eliminating the negative. The point here is that a kind of cognitive control of emotional processes can take place even if the control is not an object of reflective awareness at the time it is exercised.

It may be objected that there can be no cognitive *control* unless the relevant effects are in some way intended by the agent. There is something to this objection, but people can and do try to change the way they emotionally respond to situations even if they are not consciously striving for this goal on particular occasions of response. They proactively implement strategies that have their effect on such occasions. It may be precisely the sense that the end is in view (e.g., the sense that life is too short

to get caught up in insignificant quarreling with others) that motivates older adults to adopt goals of regulating their emotional lives, to change the outlook they bring to interpersonal interactions without necessarily regulating each such interaction with conscious regard to such goals, and there may be a great deal of wisdom in doing so.

To sum up this discussion component, then, let us note that the Mencian sprout of compassion involves capacities to discriminate others who are suffering or in danger of it, and there may be even more subtle discrimination of those who do not “deserve” to suffer—innocents. We need not claim that unlearned compassion involves explicit and reflective judgments about who is innocent and who is not. But we could say that the motivational structure of unlearned compassion involves the kind of differential response that prepares the way for the more explicit cognitive discrimination. This latter kind of discrimination could come along as the sprout grows and as an agent develops a normative framework for making explicit judgments about who is innocent and who is not. As this cognitive ability to judge and explicitly reflect develops, it can become integrated into the sort of compassion a virtuous agent feels. I will later discuss ways in which early Confucians employed something like this idea in designing their programs for cultivation of desired emotional dispositions.

3 Growing Compassion

Given the components of the sprout of compassion, what are the conditions for its growth into *ren* (human-heartedness)? The text displays ambiguity on this question. Sometimes the *Mencius* portrays growth of the sprouts as something that will occur unless it is actively interfered with. In 6A2, Mencius compares the tendency of human nature toward the ethical to water flowing downward. One can make it flow upward by damming it up or striking it. In some places, the exemplary person of comprehensive moral excellence is characterized as preserving what distinguishes human beings from the animals.³⁵ In other places realizing moral excellence is described as a matter of not losing the four hearts or feelings or of seeking the lost heart.³⁶

Other passages in the text portray the growth of the sprouts as needing proactive nurture and the realization of conditions that are highly contingent. Passage 6A7 implies that the *duan* are like sprouts that grow equally well if the soil they are planted in is the same, if nourished equally by rain and dew, and if the human effort invested is the same. What are conditions enabling moral growth for which fertile soil and water are metaphors? In this section, I lay out five such conditions derived from Mencius’ theory of the development of compassion: nurturing unlearned virtue; knowing what others desire and aspire to; development of *quan* (weighing reasons); reflection on reasons (patterns and their recognition); and analogical reasoning

(inference to the best application). These conditions contribute to a more robust contemporary theory of the development of virtue generally.

3.1 Nurturing Unlearned Virtue

In 1A7, Mencius explicitly holds the king responsible for providing material security to his subjects and in other places puts forward some fairly specific taxation, agricultural, and military policy proposals for accomplishing this.³⁷ Moreover, Mencius places responsibility on people to cultivate their own sprouts. One who nurtures the smaller part of the self becomes a small person, while one who nurtures the greater part of the self becomes a great person.³⁸ People who are always eating and drinking are considered by others to nurture what is small. Nurturing the greater part of oneself is accomplished when the heart-mind (*xin* 心; the seat of thinking, feeling and intending) reflects (*si* 思; think, reflect, focus attention, or turn over in one's mind).³⁹ Reflecting, says Mencius, the heart-mind will get it; not reflecting, the heart-mind will not get it.

6A7 suggests that *li* (pattern, order) and *yi* (rightness) please our hearts just as meat pleases our mouths. The pleasure we take in reflecting on order and righteousness, especially as we ponder them as realized in our own actions, may result in a feedback loop mechanism: as we act on our sprouts and reflect on what we have done, we take pleasure (*yue* 說), and this motivates further action to nurture the sprouts. This mechanism helps to explain why in 2A6 Mencius describes knowing how to fill out the sprouts as like a fire starting up or a spring breaking through a hole in the ground.

I have argued elsewhere that the aforementioned ambiguity in the conception of moral growth (between that which occurs in the absence of interference and that which occurs only with highly contingent, proactive nurture) is ultimately rooted in ambiguity in the *Mencius'* conception of how a trait (and specifically a virtue) can be part of our original nature.⁴⁰ Western notions of the innate share this ambiguity, and I have adopted the suggestion of some scientists and philosophers of science that it is better to adopt the notion of canalization to think about how virtues develop from their unlearned beginnings in human nature.⁴¹ Highly canalized traits develop in many different environments such that the developmental pathways leading to such traits are like very deep trenches that strongly discourage but nevertheless allow in unusual circumstances deviation from those pathways. One way to think about the ambiguity in the *Mencius'* discussions of moral growth is that it displays a slide from thinking of the virtues as highly canalized traits that grow from their sprouts unless there is interference (this corresponds to thinking of innate traits as developmentally invariant or as unfolding under "normal" circumstances) to thinking of them as less canalized traits that grow only if they are proactively nurtured and other highly contingent environmental conditions (such as material security and ethical education) are set in place.

I shall not discuss this argument in detail here, but simply assume the conception of the virtues as less canalized traits that grow from the sprouts (though I also think we must make room for varying degrees of canalization among the different sprouts). I assume it because I think it is by far the more plausible conception. 1A7 correctly suggests certain conditions for moral growth. People do need a minimum of material security to have the mental space and psychic energy to consider others' welfare in the way that morality requires; they need education and reinforcement from others and from their culture to support the development of dispositions to focus on ethical *li*, *yi*, and knowledge of how to effectively act on them. None of these conditions are ensured as a matter of the normal course of things.

3.2 Knowing What Others Desire and Aspire To

To see what a proactive nurturing of unlearned compassion would have to look like, consider what the virtue of *ren* (human-heartedness) would have to look like. The motivational directions of the sprout would have to transform and change so that they become dispositions to respond in the right ways to those who are suffering or in danger of suffering. Development of the motivational component necessitates (but is not identical with) development of the cognitive component. As was discussed earlier, part of the latter's development involves gaining knowledge of others and of how they might suffer in ways less obvious than suffering from the pain of purely physical injury. Both the positive and negative versions of the Confucian "golden rule"—"Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not want"⁴² and "*Ren* persons establish others in seeking to establish themselves, and promote others in seeking to get there themselves"—come to mind as relevant.⁴³ In Confucius' (551?–479? BCE) program, study of the *Book of Songs* (1,000–600 BCE) and accumulated experience in social interaction aid in learning the range of human desire and aspiration.

3.3 Development of *Quan*: Weighing Reasons

Knowing what others desire and aspire to, however, is just part of what needs to be acquired for dispositions to respond in the right ways to suffering others. One has to know what weight to accord to these desires and aspirations, especially if there is conflict among several others or with oneself. The fact that others will suffer is not always reason to try to spare them. It is well known that Confucians believed it was right to accord greater weight to the interests of their family than to non-family, but how to do this well and adequately protect the interests of non-family is often not an easily solved problem.⁴⁴ Developing compassion into a virtue, therefore, requires the development of good judgment, of *quan* 權, weighing or discretion.

Considerations for acting this way or that way are weighed by the exemplary person. Let us call these considerations "reasons."⁴⁵ For Mencius, reasons are not given

by desires; they are features of situations that support acting one way or another. The suffering of another is such a reason. In a virtuous person, the reasons for feeling and acting from compassion are the welfare of the people for whom one is feeling compassion. The reason is not the fact that a virtuous person desires the welfare of these others, because then a person who fails to have that desire has no moral reason to spare others from suffering. For Mencius and the other early Confucians, one should be trying to shape oneself to become the sort of person who desires the welfare of others: one has a moral reason to shape oneself in that way.

Part of the explanation of why judgments about reasons enter at a developmental stage of the unlearned emotion is that they enter into the apparatus enabling a person to decide on a particular action. One might have an unlearned urge to help, but one has to learn partly from one's culture what avenues of helping there are, and one has to develop reasoning about how to identify which avenues are appropriate given the situation at hand. One must also be prepared to deal with complicated situations in which one must prioritize helping strangers versus helping one's family. To act out of developed compassion is to realize these more sophisticated cognitive abilities. If moral development goes well, a person becomes *ren*, and such a person will know how to care for others. She will be able to balance and identify the relevant priorities in cases of apparent conflict between reasons. As was noted earlier, Mencius seems to conceive of morally appropriate compassion as channeled toward the innocent—those who do not deserve to suffer. While the unlearned form of compassion need not involve judgments as to who is innocent, there may be motivational proclivities in this direction (e.g., inclinations to approach or to avoid), and these proclivities get steered later on as the agent acquires the apparatus for identifying and reflecting on reasons.

3.4 Reflection about Reasons: Patterns (*Li*) and Their Recognition

Mencius has a conception of how we can engage in reflection about reasons. Such reflection is based on the recognition of patterns, which, as already noted, goes into the basic structure of emotion in both its motivational and cognitive components. The kind of pattern recognition that is relevant to more complex inference and reasoning is recognition of patterns that recur over time. That is, we look for recurring patterns and seek to understand the present situation in terms of patterns we have recognized and found useful in the past.⁴⁶ Consider a recent call by political scientist Valerie Hudson to recognize that human beings effectively make complex decisions based on this kind of pattern recognition:

Pattern recognition is the ability of an individual to consider a complex set of inputs, often containing hundreds of features, and make a decision based on the comparison of some subset of those features to a situation which the individual has previously encountered or learned. ... For example, chess involves a well-defined, entirely deterministic system and should be solvable

using purely logical reasoning. Chess-playing computers use this approach, but Chase and Simon (1973) found that human expert-level chess playing is done primarily by pattern recognition.⁴⁷

When used to make arguments or arrive at decisions about what to do, analogies do not compel in the way that sound deductive arguments or inferences do. They are often used when we do not know which general principles could be used as major premises of a syllogism, for example, to get a conclusion that would address the problem at hand. Instead, we often have the thought that this present problematic situation looks somewhat like a past situation about which we have more familiarity. But because problematic situations are very complex and possess many characteristics, the resemblance to the past situation will always be partial, and the potentially relevant dissimilarities may give us pause in applying the lessons of the past to the present. As a consequence, analogical argument and inferences often need to be supported through considerable discussion. The threatening dissimilarities need to be dealt with. More similarities need to be marshaled in favor of the analogy. By the time a compelling case is made, the analogy has been considerably enriched and probably qualified. Consider what type of conversation and reflection could be started with the assertion, "Afghanistan is another Vietnam for the United States. It is futile, and we need to withdraw as soon as possible."

3.5 Analogical Reasoning: Inference to the Best Application

In addressing moral problems, analogy is usefully employed when the present situation bears resemblance to past situations in which one has made sound judgments about what to do or reacted in sound ways (of course, we don't always make reflective judgments about what to do—sometimes we just act without much thought and get it right). If the past and present are relevantly similar, or perhaps more realistically, similar enough, then we may think about how the judgment made in the past has some relevant analog in the present situation. Pattern matching can take both non-conscious and conscious forms. We often are not aware of having reacted to a situation based on its similarity to past situations we have encountered until we reflect on why we acted as we did. Or we can consciously try to apply useful and illuminating patterns we have used in the past to a problematic present situation. Another important point to note is that pattern matching need not be accomplished by consulting some general principle that identifies relevant similarities. Rather, we might directly compare the features of past and present situations and find the relevant features similar enough so that the kind of judgment made in the past is transferable in some way to the present situation. In fact, reflection on relevant patterns instantiated by past and present cases may prompt us to formulate generalizations from which we derive some guidelines or rules of thumb that we could go on to consciously apply in the future.

Intertwining of Motivational and Cognitive Components These points can be illustrated by familiar cases in which one comes to see reason to spare the suffering of certain others. This reason is based on seeing that these others are not so different after all from people one already sees reason to care about. It is probably no accident that greater acceptance of gays and lesbians in the United States has followed depictions in popular television shows of sympathetic gay and lesbian characters. These characters could be a respected teacher, or uncle, or brother, or daughter, and that has prompted actual teachers, uncles, brothers, and daughters to come out, making it more difficult for those who care about them to think of that group as "them." Another example is the way many come to see reason to respond to the suffering of animals. Knowledge of how they suffer, and of our biological and psychological continuity with nonhuman animals, has persuaded many to acknowledge such a reason. These cases illustrate analogical inference from reasons to respond to suffering of family or of others one has come to love and respect to reasons to respond to the suffering of others, perhaps others that one has formerly despised or at least ignored. The inferences need not be made on a conscious level. They *may* be made consciously, and indeed agonized over, but they may be experienced as just emerging from oneself to one's own surprise. To make the analogical inference, moreover, is not necessarily to commit oneself to a general principle to the effect, for example, that we have reason to spare any human being suffering. Perhaps some may come to that conclusion based on the more concrete analogical inferences already made to extend the acknowledgment of reasons to such a general extent, but some, perhaps Mencius, may not want to extend that reason to people who are very far from innocence. The point is that one might be a lot more confident that one has made a sound inference from a particular case in the past to the present situation without knowing what general principle would enable one to make countless other inferences.⁴⁸

As indicated earlier, the motivational and cognitive components of compassion are intertwined, such that discriminating those who suffer and being ready to respond in some way are tied together. The person who has developed compassion as a reflective agent and is on the way to developing it as a virtue will feel compassion while recognizing a reason to spare the suffering of others. Her feeling of readiness to respond will be integrated with acknowledgment of a reason to respond. The motivational and cognitive components will be intertwined in these more sophisticated and developed ways.

This more sophisticated intertwining is frequently not an easy thing to accomplish. One can recognize and accept a reason to spare the suffering of certain others, but not be emotionally moved to do so. Indeed, one might be in that position about gays and lesbians. One might acknowledge that one has reason to respond to their suffering in ways that are similar to the ways one has reason to respond to the suffering of people one cares about. One might care about the gays and lesbians who turn out to

be one's teacher, uncle, brother, or daughter, but remain uncaring about gays and lesbians who are strangers or mere acquaintances. The same situation might hold for animals. One now sees that they can suffer in ways that are relevantly similar to the elemental suffering of human beings who experience abuse and torture. But one remains uncaring or caring only for one's pets. The cognitive component is unaccompanied by the motivational and feeling components. One might feel no readiness to act but actually recognize a reason to act.

It might be argued that analogical inference can lead to change in one's motivations given concern about cognitive dissonance.⁴⁹ There are some people who are very concerned about cognitive dissonance that arises among their beliefs and perceptions, and that may lead to their feeling compassion toward others for whom they have previous not felt it. But many of us are not necessarily concerned above all else to eliminate cognitive dissonance. Many times we put up with it or manage very well to avert our attention from it. Even if we are very concerned with cognitive dissonance, we might choose to go in the "wrong" direction of retracting the warrant for feeling compassion in the past situation (maybe one's teacher is not so respected after all, if he is gay). Furthermore, people can be quite ingenious in finding some difference between groups of people that becomes relevant and that justifies a differential reaction to their suffering. Freud's reference to the "narcissism of minor differences"⁵⁰ is relevant here. Whether one comes to extend compassion, then, can start with coming to see relevant similarities one hadn't seen before, but that is not a sufficient condition.

Intertwining of Motivational and Visceral Components Given the drawbacks of strategies that attempt to use analogical inference to persuade someone to be more compassionate out of the concern for consistency or rationality, we must ask whether analogical inference can play some other kind of role in promoting compassion as motivational or visceral component. At this point, let me discuss in detail the passage in the *Mencius* that is most relevant to this question: the 1A7 story of Mencius' conversation with King Xuan about the time he spared the ox from ritual slaughter. In the course of trying to persuade King Xuan that he could become a true king who could bring peace to his people, Mencius asks the king whether it was true that he had spared an ox being led to ritual slaughter. In recalling the event, the king professes some uncertainty as to what his motives were, but is persuaded by Mencius that he was moved by compassion for the ox. Its trembling reminded him, the king recalls, of an innocent man going to execution. Mencius concludes that the king fails to bring peace to his people not because of any inability to act but because of a simple failure to act. All that the king has to do, Mencius explains, is to take this mind of compassion he has applied to the ox and apply it to his own people.

There has been quite a bit of debate over the question of how Mencius might have thought about what he was trying to do with the king. The passage itself does not provide definitive evidence. When it is combined with other things Mencius says about moral development, however, the passage is greatly useful as a stimulus for articulating a psychologically realistic picture of moral growth that is in the Mencian spirit. The passage, after all, is a plausible description of how one might try to encourage someone to expand the scope of his compassion, especially if the context is the king just having asked whether he could be the kind of king Mencius is urging him to be: one who could draw people to him because of the way he treats them rather than one who forces their submission through inciting fear. It would make sense in that context to ask whether it was true that he had spared the ox. This is reminding the king of a capacity he has that would draw his people to him if he extends it to them.

In this passage, the analogies that Mencius presses on King Xuan appear crucial for what Mencius is trying to do, but it is not the obvious role we might expect. He is not trying to motivate the king out of a concern for consistency, or at least, this interpretation doesn't give Mencius a very promising strategy for persuading the king, precisely for the reasons outlined earlier. His primary aim is probably not even to get the king to recognize that he has a moral reason to spare his people suffering. The king probably already knew that, at least intellectually. The question is whether he cares about that, and that is probably the thrust of the king's initial question to Mencius of whether he can be a true king. Mencius' answer is not to persuade him of the descriptive claim that the king does in fact care about his people's welfare. He is trying to get him to care, and not by way of appeal to consistency.

To motivate another interpretation of what Mencius might be trying to do with the king, let me turn to a claim that Clore and Ortony make about two ways in which an object can acquire emotional meaning for a person.⁵¹ One way is through "direct computation" of the meaning of the object. Direct computation is a frequently conscious process. For example, one overhears belittling remarks uttered by a work colleague about oneself. One reacts by thinking that one has done nothing to deserve these remarks and becomes angry and hurt. The other way that an object can acquire emotional meaning is "reinstatement." A work colleague physically resembles a merciless bully from one's childhood. One is frequently provoked by apparently innocent remarks by this colleague. Reinstatement is frequently non-conscious and is based on resemblance between features of the past situation that provoked the emotion and those of the present situation.⁵² If the association between the two situations is non-conscious, this can be a serious barrier to self-understanding of why one is presently feeling a certain way, and if the evocative point of resemblance does not warrant the present feeling, we have a paradigm case of unwarranted emotion. For example, the fact that one's work colleague has curly red hair, as the

bully in the past did, is not a good reason to feel the way one is feeling. Clore and Ortony emphasize the non-conscious and frequently unwarranted nature of reinstated emotion.

However, reacting to the present on the basis of resemblance to a past situation can be warranted and/or a conscious matter. Sometimes one finds oneself reacting to a present situation on grounds one is not conscious of, but it may turn out that those grounds are available to conscious awareness upon introspection, and they turn out to be good reasons for feeling the way one is feeling. One might feel uneasy and anxious in the presence of a stranger, and one is picking up on a non-conscious level the signs of untrustworthy motives one has encountered in the past. Sometimes such emotions are better detectors of highly relevant features of our environment than conscious surveillance. But the knowledge of that fact may prompt one to pay conscious attention to what such emotions might be detecting in the environment. Or to go back to the case of compassion, one might with surprise find oneself reacting with compassion to the suffering of a gay or lesbian person. But one's feelings of compassion might convey that one has come to see them in a different way, perhaps as having the same concerns and qualities as people with whom one has identified and felt compassion for in the past. The perception of relevant similarity and the other components of the emotion may come along before one becomes consciously aware of how one's views have changed and the way the change has affected one's emotional dispositions. Or one might first become consciously aware of the relevant similarity, and that may arouse the compassion. The fact that we can conceive of its going in either direction is a sign of the continuity of non-conscious and conscious reflective cognition.

King Xuan's reaction to the ox was, in Clore and Ortony's words, a "reinstated emotion." As he recalls at Mencius' prompting, he saw the ox's suffering as like the suffering of an innocent man going to execution. But the king also thought the ritual had to go on, and so substituted a sheep. Does this mean he was mistaken to have spared the ox? Was he mistaken in a way like reacting angrily to a work colleague because of an irrelevant resemblance to a bully of the past? Emily McRae asserts that this is the case in arguing that in some of my previous work on this passage I was mistaken in thinking that analogical inference plays a role in Mencius' attempt to get the king to feel compassion for his people.⁵³ Mencius is not, McRae argues, trying to get the king to go from one case of right to another, because in his view it was not right to spare the ox and that there is certainly, she thinks, an incongruity in sparing the ox while not sparing the people. Though I agree with much of what McRae goes on to say about extending the sprouts in Mencius, I think she is wrong on this point about sparing the ox.

It is significant that King Xuan was not sure what his motives were for sparing the ox. He might have been confused by his own actions of first sparing the ox and then

substituting a sheep so that the ritual ceremony could go on. Mencius in effect supplies the king with an explanation: he could not bear the ox's suffering having seen it, but (as Mencius himself believes), the ritual takes precedence over the ox's suffering. And that is the reason why it was right to substitute the sheep. But once having accidentally seen the suffering of the ox, the king was right to spare it. This is what an exemplary person would do, says Mencius. And that is why the exemplary person stays away from the kitchen.⁵⁴

The suggestion here is that an exemplary person nurtures his compassion, even when in general he should avoid engaging potential objects of his compassion when he has weightier reasons not to spare them. Thus, the king was right to feel compassion and to spare it once having accidentally seen the ox's suffering; he was also right to substitute the sheep, not having seen it, for the ceremony. Though coherent and justifiable given Mencius' position on the lesser importance of animals and the great importance of ritual, this might appear to contemporary eyes to be an awkward position with respect to the suffering of animals, but many of us to this day find ourselves in similar awkward positions—seeing their similarity to us in their vulnerability to suffering, but asserting the priority of legitimate human interests over those of animals.

The analogy from sparing the innocent man to sparing the ox is a sound one in Mencius' view, and so is the analogy from sparing the ox to sparing the people. In fact, the king has far greater reason to spare his people. But, as was noted earlier, the point of pressing this analogy was not to teach the king some new moral knowledge. He probably already knew that he had a moral reason to spare his people. The point was to start with a case in which the king had felt compassion for another being's suffering and to have him recall it and to relive it. Mencius is trying to get the king to consciously reinstate his emotion of compassion through reflection on the analogies from the suffering of the innocent man to the suffering of the ox to the suffering of the people. He is reflecting on and reliving what he felt for the innocent man and the ox, and Mencius is hoping to get that feeling, the bodily readiness to respond and the motivational inclination, to flow to the king's people.

Thus, rather trying to teach the king anything new in reminding him that he has a reason to spare his people, Mencius is trying to get the king to *feel* the reason to spare his people. I have emphasized that reasons are not based on what the agent desires. They are situational features that make it right and appropriate for an agent to do certain things. But even though reasons are not grounded in motivational inclinations, they do depend on these inclinations for their efficacy. Recall that the heart-mind itself is not a separate agential entity pulling the levers that control *qi* (like a Cartesian mind manipulating the pineal gland) but is composed of *qi* itself and therefore must draw from at least some of the unlearned motivational directions of *qi* in forming and executing its aims. This dependence is plausibly the lesson of the parable of the man from Song in 2A2, who tries to "help" his seedlings to grow by pulling on

them. He harms them by trying to force their growth without regard to their internal readiness to grow. On the other hand, Mencius believes it is a grave mistake to neglect the sprouts and in particular not to weed among them. This connects with the 6A14 reference to the need to nurture the greater parts of the self rather than the smaller parts. One must nurture the ethical directions of *qi* that are embedded in the sprouts, and that means not only to feed them but to get them to grow further in those directions. Acknowledging what one has reason to do will help, but such acknowledgment will only help if it becomes married to the motivational force of *qi*.

The relevant kind of analogical inference does not just transmit sound judgment and response to past situations along the lines of relevant similarity to sound judgment and response in present situations. In the right circumstances, it can transmit the motivational force of *qi* along those lines of relevant similarity. Thus, the "base" cases of sound judgment in past situations from which sound analogies are drawn must also be cases in which one was moved appropriately by emotion.

Motivation through Gratification The bodily readiness to respond, and in general the forms of liking (*hao*) and disliking (*wu*) that constitute the motivational component of emotion, can grow along analogical directions, along the lines of relevant similarity. When we have wanted something *x*, and if in satisfying that desire we gain satisfaction, we look for other things that are like *x*. To take the most primordial cases, when we seek something to quench our thirst and succeed in finding something that provides gratification, we look for things that are similar. When we seek food to satisfy hunger, and find something that gratifies the hunger, we look for similar things. This is one of our most basic and adaptive dispositions. It is so important that we have non-conscious and fast ways of detecting the relevant similarities, but our consciousness provides slower and reflective means of examining or re-considering relevant similarities.

A crucial part of this story is that we find gratification in the object that our desire leads us to pursue. This is not always the case. Sometimes we are profoundly disappointed in pursuing something that we think will gratify. If compassion has the possibility of growing along the lines I have suggested, then, the desire to spare others from suffering must be gratifying. We must have built into us a disposition to find gratification in the object that our compassionate concern leads us to pursue, such that we look for similar objects. Mencius was confident that we are so built, and this is what he meant when he said in 2A6 that acting on our sprouts on knowing how to fill out the sprouts was like a fire starting up or a spring breaking through a hole in the ground. Acting on them gives us pleasure, which in turn spurs us on to finding relevantly similar opportunities to do more.

Mencius might indeed have put his finger on something that contemporary neuroscience confirms. Moll and his colleagues found that anonymous charitable giving

based on ethical beliefs corresponds to activation of reward systems in fronto-limbic brain networks that are also activated by food, sex, drugs, and money.⁵⁵ Such giving is also linked to networks that control the release of oxytocin and vasopressin, the neurohormones that are linked to human and some other mammalian attachment to offspring, and among monogamous mammals, linked to attachment between cohabiting sexual partners and same-sex conspecifics.⁵⁶ Other studies link these neurohormones to temporary attachment between strangers, increasing trust, reciprocity, and generosity.⁵⁷ We might indeed have built into us dispositions to want and to find pleasure in responding to the needs of others.

Mencius' insight into how desire expands and grows in its objects is extremely important and points to an alternative way to think about how reflection and emotion and desire interact so as to produce new motivation. The Kantian tradition only gives us a rather impoverished version of a reified entity of reason generating its own motivation apart from the inclinations that drive our lives as social animals. The Humean tradition has tended to promote an instrumental view of how desires change in their scope or how new desires get generated. Changing or new desires result from existing desires, with reason providing relevant information: sometimes we desire new things as means to satisfying desires we already have; sometimes new desires get generated as more specific forms of a more general desire, such as the desire for something fabulous to garner my neighbor's admiration leading to the desire for a Porsche or for a swimming pool.

The alternative Mencian conception of desire as growing along analogical lines is plausible in an evolutionary framework, but it is also plausible from observation of the human psychic economy. It is a familiar phenomenon that we often don't know what we want and that we must engage with the world to get more knowledge of that. We have basic desires and aversions, likes and dislikes for certain things, but if we are lucky these only ensure our immediate survival. To know what else we want, we must explore other things in the world, and one's adaptive mechanism for doing so is starting with what has gratified us in the past. It need not be exactly the same, but only relevantly similar. But we must go and seek these out.

In this Mencian conception of the moral growth of compassion, moral teaching and learning interact with the unlearned form of compassion. Analogical inference may play a role in generating new moral knowledge. But in addition, extension of the visceral and motivational components to cases where moral knowledge points it is not ensured. Mencius seemed to envision a strategy of teaching in which the learner is prompted to experience compassion again in conjunction with being presented with a new and appropriate object for the visceral and motivational components.

Moral knowledge can grow through analogical inference, and so can desire. The double role of analogy is appropriate to the foundational role of pattern recognition

in human response to the world. The two kinds of analogical processes are parallel. However, they are not the same because desire does not grow from the necessity to be logically consistent but from what one wants and has found gratifying in the past to what is relevantly like what one wants. There is no compulsion from logic for desire to move in this way. Nevertheless the two processes both operate in the moral growth of compassion. The trick is to get analogical growth of the feeling, the visceral and motivational components to interact with analogical growth of the cognitive component.

There is a striking resonance with this Mencian picture from some recent psychological theorizing on empathy and ethical development. The psychologist Martin Hoffman has suggested that a child begins to internalize morality when she experiences empathic distress upon witnessing another person's distress.⁵⁸ The earliest modes of empathic arousal are primitive, automatic, and involuntary processes. Hoffman thinks that the most effective child rearing takes advantage of occasions when primitive empathy is aroused and used in moral teaching. A child hurts another, for example, and an adult might arouse empathy in the perpetrator by pointing out the effect on the victim, expressing disapproval, and suggesting apology or reparation. When such a sequence is repeated many times, "scripts" are created and encoded in memory so that they influence later decisions and behavior. It is important that the kind of induction that presents moral reasons to the child be given in an emotionally evocative situation so that the cognition of what the child is being taught can be made "hot" by the activation of affective and motivational proclivities and through the linking of the proclivities to the reasons.

In Mencian terms, the primal empathic proclivities to which Hoffman points are part of the sprout of compassion. The neurological bases of these proclivities may include the release of oxytocin and vasopressin, as mentioned earlier. The sort of teaching that parents do with their children in the context of activated empathy for another who is suffering corresponds to the sort of teaching Mencius was trying to do with the king. Mencius is trying to embed a conception of what a true king does for his people in the king's emotional proclivities for compassion, such that this conception becomes emotionally charged and gains motivational efficacy. At the same time, the compassion is appropriately enlarged through getting the king to use his heart to reflect on what is right and appropriate for him to do as a king.

The anthropologist Naomi Quinn identifies one cross-cultural universal of child rearing as the linking of moral lessons with emotional arousal, so as to make the lessons unmistakable, memorable, and motivating.⁵⁹ In her discussion of Chinese child rearing, for example, Quinn identifies the practice of shaming as an instrument for bringing home a moral lesson to a child while emotionally arousing him or her. There is even a hint of shaming when Mencius tells King Xuan in something of a scolding

tone that for the king to say his kindness can reach to the birds and beasts but that he cannot bring benefits to his people is like saying he is strong enough to lift 500 pounds but not strong enough to lift a single feather.

4 How Moral Development Becomes Self-Cultivation in the *Mencius*

So far we see Mencius nudging King Xuan to relieve his compassion for the ox and to transfer it to his people. But the development of character in Confucianism must ultimately place someone like King Xuan at the center of efforts to improve his character. Self-cultivation is never cultivation by the self alone, but as Mencius makes clear in 6A14–15, a person must take personal responsibility for cultivating his sprouts by reflecting on their manifestations and on what he experiences when he acts on them. As was noted earlier, Mencius believes with good reason that we are built to take pleasure in such reflection and action. Both the *Analects* (fifth to third centuries BCE) and the *Mencius* seem to assume that the very ideal of an exemplary person has magnetic power, i.e., that people are drawn to, are influenced and inspired by this person. And this magnetism is a kind of motivation for taking on the sustained project of self-cultivation.

☞ The Immordino-Yang study of people who are told stories designed to evoke their admiration and compassion provides some striking confirmation of this idea. The results connecting the experience of compassion and admiration with felt visceral changes in one's body have earlier been noted. Immordino-Yang and her colleagues interviewed experiment participants to get self-reports about what they were feeling and thinking as a result of being told true stories about other people that elicited admiration or compassion. From the content of the interviews and from the finding that there was a high level of brain activity in areas of the brain associated with a feeling of self and interoceptive information from visceral sensation and regulation, they speculated that their grappling with the import of the stories evoked strong visceral reactions, the felt experience of which then prompted them to reflect on the meaning of these stories for themselves and their own moral standing.

One person, who reacted to a story meant to induce compassion and involving a mother and young son who made sacrifices for each other, described a "balloon or something just under [his] sternum, inflating and moving up and out." This made the participant think about how he had not thanked his own parents enough for their sacrifices.⁶⁰ Another experiment participant reported her reaction to a story meant to induce admiration for moral virtue as becoming "more sensitive to the temperature inside you ... a visceral reaction that feels like an emotional alertness" and making her want to spend a year or two dedicated to the story protagonist's cause.⁶¹ Immordino-Yang suggests that the participants' responses to the stories prompted visceral reactions in one's body that prompt self-awareness and self-evaluation. In the Confucian

program of self-cultivation, "true" stories about historical leaders of the past seemed to have served the same function as stimuli for self-reflection and self-evaluation. We may see the participants in Immordino-Yang's study as engaging in Mencian reflection on the manifestation of their sprouts, beginning with feeling their *qi* move in response.

5 Going Beyond Mencius

It must be said that Mencius did not succeed in his attempted interventions with King Xuan. He did not help set King Xuan on course to become a true king. Perhaps a good part of the explanation of his failure is lack of the kind of constancy that Quinn describes as another universal feature of child rearing: moral lessons are a pervasive and consistent feature of social life for a child, often not explicitly stated, but communicated in a glance, a gesture, a posture, even in what is not said, that is observed in adults by children. Quinn even suggests some neurological correlates to the effects of these universal features. The regularity of lesson-giving strengthens certain synaptic connections in the brain; and drawing from Joseph LeDoux's seminal work,⁶² Quinn points out that hormones released during emotional arousal actually strengthen synaptic connections and organize and coordinate brain activity, crowding out all but the emotionally relevant experience out of consciousness. One might surmise that constancy of lesson-giving, woven into the fabric of everyday life, strengthens these synaptic connections even more.

In the *Analects*, what we see there is in fact a community where such constancy and reinforcement are supplied under the leadership of Confucius. One can well imagine how the slightest look and posture of the body from Confucius could bring home a lesson to his students,⁶³ much less to speak of the times when he erupts into frank and sometimes harsh and shaming criticism of his students' failings.⁶⁴ The special value of the *Analects* lies in the way it portrays self-cultivation as a project done with others. A project in which the participants are committed to realizing the same values is one that can provide great support and reinforcement for each individual. After all, one has committed oneself "publicly," in front of one's fellows to the realization of these values in oneself, and that in itself can provide a great deal of additional motivation. There is also the fact that one is collaborating in such a project with others who know one well and can provide support, encouragement and needed criticism that is especially apt for the particular person. *Analects* 11.22 illustrates this last point: Confucius gives apparently contradictory advice to Zilu and to Ran You because they are two different people who need to improve in very different ways.

The special relationship between Yan Hui and Confucius illustrates a relationship of mutual support that can occur between two people deeply committed to the same project. The two share a deep and abiding love of learning, and in the early Confucian tradition learning was widely construed to include study and practice that can

transform the self.⁶⁵ Such love of learning ensures constancy of effort in the face of obstacles and is a crucial quality for a successful project of moral cultivation. The *Analects* makes clear in various places why strong and constant motivation is needed in the face of resistance not only from circumstances but also from the self. No wonder, then, that Confucius singles out Yan Hui among all his students for being able to go for three months without departing in his thoughts and feelings from *ren* (human-heartedness), the trait of the exemplary person sometimes associated with loving others,⁶⁶ but most often treated in the *Analects* (but not the *Mencius*) as the all-inclusive and comprehensive virtue that includes all the particular virtues.

The two had a kind of father-son relationship that becomes poignant when Yan Hui dies young and Confucius grieves with abandon and desires to bury him as he would his own son.⁶⁷ The father guided the son in his difficult journey to follow the father's teachings: "The Master is good at drawing me forward a step at a time; he broadens me with culture (*wen* 文) and disciplines my behavior through the observance of ritual propriety."⁶⁸ But the son serves as inspirational example for the father in his love of, and quickness in, learning, and in his ability to focus on *ren*. This relationship of teaching and learning, mutual support, example, and inspiration fits the definition of Aristotle's character friendship, the highest form of friendship, in which friends value the moral excellence of each other's character and desire each other's well-being for their friend's sake.⁶⁹

However, there are three respects in which the portrait of Confucius and Yan Hui's relationship complements and goes beyond Aristotle's discussion of character friendship. First, it provides a vivid and concrete sense of how two character friends can appreciate each other's moral excellence. Secondly, their relationship illustrates how character friends mutually support and sustain one another in their projects of moral cultivation. It is no surprise that two people whose moral excellence is especially notable for love of learning should forge a deep bond of mutual commitment and support. When Confucius lost his beloved Yan Hui, he lost (to use Aristotle's felicitous characterization of character friendship) "another self."

The third respect in which the *Analects'* portrait of Confucius and Yan Hui's relationship goes beyond Aristotle's discussion of character friendship has to do with how these two men differ. Friends not only share deep affinities, but can also bring different strengths to their relationship, such that each can contribute to the other's moral excellence in ways the other could not have achieved without that friend. Amy Olberding has deployed François Jullien's notion of the bland to suggest that Yan Hui's dullness as a character—he has no dramatic and attention-capturing traits such as Zilu's bull-in-a-china-shop boldness, for example—is precisely one of his great strengths, in that it results from all one's qualities held in a kind of balance such that no one quality predominates. This balance or equanimity makes the bearer

open to determination, ready to absorb the requirements of the situation and to respond accordingly.⁷⁰ Confucius' character is so different from Yan Hui's salutary blandness that one is tempted to call it spicy. As Christoph Harbsmeier has pointed out, Confucius often comes across in the *Analects* as earthy, often self-deprecating, impulsive, given to outbursts that are often harsh or sweeping criticisms of politicians and of his students, but possessed of a short memory of his negative feelings and who is capable of appreciation and fondness for the strengths of the same students he criticizes.⁷¹

Confucius' persona is most appropriate for the "Master," one who has not only the authority and charisma but also the temperament to direct frank and, if need be, harsh criticisms of those engaged in cultivation. At the same time, Confucius' humor, often self-deprecating, defuses what might otherwise be the alienating effects of his criticism of students. They know he is not only prepared to be criticized, but invites it through his own affectionate critique of Yan Hui as never disagreeing with him. Thus, the way in which Confucius takes joy in questing after *ren* is not the same as Yan Hui's, and it is not the same in a way that is suitable to his role as a teacher and father figure to Yan Hui.

To make my final point about the need to go beyond Mencius, let us note that in the *Analects* and the *Xunzi* (third to second? century BCE) especially, there is heavy emphasis on performing rituals that are designed to symbolize and convey ethically appropriate attitudes such as concern and respect for others (from reverent ways of burying one's family members, respectful ways of getting married, to respectful greeting of others and ways of eating meals with others). If one takes care to perform these rituals with the right attitudes, one hopes to make them part of one's psychological "muscle memory," and again to instill them so that they become spontaneous and integral to one's being in the world.⁷² Setting aside Confucius himself, it was Xunzi (third century BCE) among all the early Confucians, who was most appreciative of the necessity for constant and assiduous cultivation of the emotions and desires, and of how it took the right supportive relationships and engagement with the right cultural practices. Much more than Mencius, I believe, Xunzi had a correct and keen appreciation for the way that an undue focus on the self stands in the way of cultivating the morally congenial emotions such as compassion. Recall the vein of thought in Mencius that original goodness is like water flowing downward. I suspect it is this vein of thought that influenced him to underemphasize the need to discipline the part of the self that is concerned only for itself.

Centuries later, Neo-Confucians such as Zhu Xi (1130–1200) and Wang Yangming (1472–1529) canonized Mencius over Xunzi, and this might in part have been because the side of Mencius that likened the goodness of human nature with water flowing downward was more compatible with Buddhism's similar conception of goodness as

residing complete in human nature but obscured by desire. In my view, the more fruitful direction would have involved a synthesis of Mencius and Xunzi, but that is the occasion for another discussion.

Notes

1. E.g., Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism*; Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*; and Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*.
2. E.g., Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions* and Jesse Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*.
3. David B. Wong, "Is There a Distinction between Reason and Emotion in Mencius?" and Wong, "Reasons and Analogical Reasoning in Mengzi."
4. I have learned from criticisms of my earlier writings on this subject by Craig Ihara ("David Wong on Emotions In Mencius"), Philip Ivanhoe ("Confucian Self Cultivation and Mengzi's Notion of Extension"), and Emily McRae ("The Cultivation of Moral Feelings and Mengzi's Method of Extension"). While I can't say that I fully accept their criticisms or their suggested alternative interpretations of Mencius, reflecting on their criticisms has helped me to form an interpretation that I hope is more plausible both as an interpretation and as a view of how emotions, such as compassion, can become moral virtues.
5. I owe the "how" formulation of the Chinese interest in the practical to Kwong-loi Shun, who articulated it in a commentary on my lectures on Chinese Philosophy and the Development of Compassion, delivered as the Philomathia Lectures at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in May 2012 and to appear in revised form in the journal *Dao*.
6. Kwong-loi Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, 185.
7. Roger T. Ames, "The Mencian Conception of *Ren Xing*."
8. I do not intend what I say about compassion to apply necessarily to all the other sprouts. For one thing, it is not clear that the approval/disapproval that is the sprout of wisdom is necessarily an emotion or has an emotional component. For another thing, it is not clear that all the sprouts that are or involve emotions need to have the same character or relate to reflective processes in exactly the same way. For a discussion of the emotional content of *hao* and *wu*, see Bruya, "*Qing* 情 and Emotion in Early Chinese Thought."
9. *Mencius*, 1A7.
10. *Ibid.*, 3A5, 6A4, 7A45.
11. *Ibid.*, 4A27.
12. Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error*.
13. Alan K. L. Chan, "A Matter of Taste," 52.

14. Should anyone but an early Chinese person take the conception of *qi* seriously? Contemporary physics has dislodged the mechanistic conception of matter as inert substance pushed around by forces. We are now closer to viewing matter as a kind of condensed energy-stuff. My point is not that the early Chinese were exactly right about the equivalence between matter and energy, but rather that their view of *qi* is an interesting form of naturalistic materialism, where the "material" is not as lumpy and inert as we used to think it was. This picture of *qi*, I hope to show, has plausible consequences for understanding the relationship between thinking, feeling, and motivation.

15. For more on different kinds of *qi*, see Chan, "A Matter of Taste."

16. See *ibid.*, 51.

17. Mary Helen Immordino-Yang et al., "Neural Correlates of Admiration and Compassion."

18. D. C. Lau translates 壹 as "blocked," so as to make the relevant line in the *Mencius* read "The will, when blocked, moves the *qi*" (Lau, *Mencius*, 32), but a much less misleading translation would focus on the related meaning used by Zhu Xi in his commentary on this passage, i.e., that of "convergence" or "concentration" of *qi*. See Chan, "A Matter of Taste," 47–48.

19. I would gloss 理 *li* in this context as a "normative order in things," but later on I will emphasize a more general human ability for recognition of the relevant similarities and dissimilarities between things and situations is crucial to the Mencian development of the sprouts.

20. J. Kiley Hamlin, Karen Wynn, and Paul Bloom, "Social Evaluation by Preverbal Infants"; Hamlin, Wynn, and Bloom, "Three-Month-Olds Show a Negativity Bias in their Social Evaluations"; Hamlin and Wynn, "Young Infants Prefer Prosocial to Antisocial Others."

21. Hamlin et al., "How Infants and Toddlers React to Antisocial Others."

22. For a survey of the recent experimental evidence undermining the assumption that "basic" emotions such as fear and anger are reliably accompanied by a stereotypical set of actions, see Lisa F. Barrett, Kevin N. Ochsner, and James J. Gross, "On the Automaticity of Emotion."

23. See note 19 above.

24. In first writing about this issue, I held that unlearned compassion had a cognitive component that was something like a judgment: that one has a reason to help someone who is suffering or to spare someone suffering (Wong, "Is There a Distinction between Reason and Emotion in *Mencius*?"). Craig Ihara responded quite justifiably that a person can feel compassion and yet make no judgments about reasons ("David Wong on Emotions in *Mencius*"). My initial response to this criticism was to suggest that our concept of compassion is a prototype concept, the application of which is governed by a paradigm or prototype. There are no necessary and sufficient conditions for an emotion's being compassion, but rather a set of features embodying the average or most typical instances of compassion. An emotion is a candidate for falling under the concept of compassion is more likely to qualify the more it resembles typical instances, but there is more than one way of coming close enough to the typical. I still think this response is

in principle true, but as a response to Ihara is inadequate. It now strikes me that unlearned compassion need not have the cognitive component of recognizing a reason to help in order to serve as a sprout from which the virtue of *ren* (human-heartedness) can grow. It does not indeed have to be a judgment of any kind. As indicated earlier, it does have a cognitive component, but one that is less cognitively sophisticated than a judgment, much less a judgment of recognizing that one has a reason. At some point, as the sprout is developing on the way to becoming a virtue, I do think that compassion incorporates the judgment that one has reason to help.

25. *Encyclopedia of Cognitive Science*, s.v. "Analogical Reasoning, Psychology of."

26. Immordino-Yang et al., "Neural Correlates of Admiration and Compassion."

27. *Ibid.*, 8024.

28. The brain areas showing high levels of activity in compassion for social pain were the inferior/posterior PMC (posteromedial cortices) and the anterior middle cingulate, which are affiliated with interoceptive information; by contrast, emotions related to someone else's "physical" state, e.g., painful injury, may recruit the sector of PMC most connected with lateral parietal cortices, suggesting a connection to exteroception and musculoskeletal information.

29. See Gerald L. Clore and Andrew Ortony, "Cognition in Emotion," 42.

30. Jesse Prinz appears to build his theory of emotion, including moral emotion, on such a restricted basis (*The Emotional Construction of Morals*).

31. Such as Clore and Ortony.

32. Barrett, Ochsner, and Gross, "On the Automaticity of Emotion."

33. For possible neurobiological models incorporating psychological theories of emotion and neurobiology that are meant to capture multidirectional causality between the various components of emotion, see Marc D. Lewis, "Bridging Emotion Theory and Neurobiology through Dynamic Systems Modeling."

34. Mara Mather and Laura L. Carstensen, "Aging and Motivated Cognition."

35. *Mencius* 4B19, 4B28.

36. *Ibid.*, 6A10, 6A11.

37. E.g., *ibid.*, 2A5, 3A3.

38. *Ibid.*, 6A14.

39. *Ibid.*, 6A15.

40. Wong, Chinese Philosophy and the Development of Compassion (lectures).

41. Conrad H. Waddington, "Canalization of Development and the Inheritance of Acquired Characters"; David S. Moore, *The Dependent Gene*.

42. *Analects* 12.2. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

43. *Analects* 6.30, adapted from Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr., *The Analects of Confucius*.

44. *Mencius* 7A35 presents Mencius' view of what Shun the sage-king would have done had his father murdered a man, and thus when Shun had to balance his duties not to interfere with the Minister of Justice against his duties as a son.

45. An issue I will not get into here is where Mencius thinks moral reasons ultimately come from. I think the ultimate source for Mencius is *tian* (heaven). I am inclined to believe that Mencius' conception of *tian* is such as to imply a strongly realist view of moral properties such as moral reasons or rightness as part of the normative order given by *tian*, but this is a contentious issue (for a conception of *tian* as a creative force that includes human creative powers to collectively and individually fashion values and practices, see Ames, "The Mencian Conception of *Ren Xing*" and "Mencius and a Process Notion of Human Nature"). If the realist interpretation is right, then presumably *tian* confers on human beings the ability to identify moral properties. But I will not argue the issue here. Xunzi provides an alternative conception of where the properties come from that are more palatable to those with a more naturalistic bent—i.e., that they are human inventions designed in the course of regulating human psychology so that people may cease coming into conflict with each other over the means to satisfy desire. Xunzi thinks that nothing other than a radical psychological transformation will be required for a productive and harmonious society. But he agrees with Mencius that reasons are not derived from desire but rather from those considerations that guide the shaping of human desire.

46. See Wong, "Reasons and Analogical Reasoning in Mengzi."

47. Valerie M. Hudson, Philip A. Schrodt, and Ray D. Whitmer, "A New Kind of Social Science."

48. For further discussion of this question, see Wong, "Reasons and Analogical Reasoning in Mengzi."

49. David Nivison interprets Mencius as making this sort of argument in 1A7 but is appropriately skeptical about the effectiveness of such an argument (Nivison, "Mencius and Motivation").

50. Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality*, 272.

51. Clore and Ortony, "Cognition in Emotion."

52. Clore and Ortony go on to characterize these processes in ways I don't necessarily think are the most useful. They hold that direct computation of emotional meaning is "theory-based," i.e., rule-based computation of emotional meaning based on "underlying" aspects of the situation rather than "surface" features that are perceptually accessible. Reinstatement is "prototype"-based processing that goes on the similarity of perceptually accessible features (*ibid.*, 37) possessed by a present situation to that of a past situation that has triggered an emotion, resulting in reinstatement of that emotion in the present. This categorization neglects the possibility that the similarity between situations that can reinstate an emotion need not be based on surface similarity. This possibility will be explored shortly.

53. Emily McRae, "The Cultivation of Moral Feelings and Mengzi's Method of Extension," 593; Wong, "Is There a Distinction between Reason and Emotion in Mencius?"

54. Mencius 7A45. The exemplary person loves animals but is not *ren* toward them.
55. Jorge Moll et al., "Human Fronto-Mesolimbic Networks Guide Decisions about Charitable Donation."
56. Paul J. Zak, "The Neuroeconomics of Trust."
57. Paul J. Zak, "Trust: a Temporary Human Attachment Facilitated by Oxytocin"; Paul J. Zak, Robert Kurzban, and William T. Matzner, "Oxytocin is Associated with Human Trustworthiness"; Morhenn et al., "Monetary Sacrifice among Strangers Is Mediated by Endogenous Oxytocin Release after Physical Contact."
58. Martin L. Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development*.
59. Naomi Quinn, "Universals of Child Rearing."
60. Immordino-Yang, "Me, My 'Self' and You," 313–314.
61. *Ibid.*, 314.
62. Joseph E. LeDoux, *Synaptic Self*, 200–234.
63. For the very interesting connections between the Confucian emphasis on subtle details of personal style and the way an agent can influence others through such details, see Hagop Sarkisian, "Minor Tweaks, Major Payoffs."
64. E.g., the interactions with Zai Wo in *Analects* 5.10 and 17.21.
65. *Ibid.*, 1.1, 7.19, 6.3, 6.11.
66. *Ibid.*, 12.22.
67. *Ibid.*, 11.10, 11.11.
68. *Ibid.*, 9.11; Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, 128.
69. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books 8 and 9.
70. François Jullien, "The Chinese Notion of 'Blandness' as a Virtue"; Amy Olberding, "The Consummation of Sorrow."
71. Christoph Harbsmeier, "Confucius Ridens."
72. For illuminating development of these themes in relation to the problem of "situationism" for virtue ethics, see Edward Slingerland, "Toward an Empirically Responsible Ethics" and Slingerland, "The Situationist Critique and Early Confucian Virtue Ethics."

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