Li, qing, and ethical transformation in the Xunzi

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Abstract

This paper analyses the connection between knowing *Dao* and ethical transformation in Xunzi's thought. While there have been many discussions concerning what *Dao* is and how one may come to *Dao*, there has not been sufficient attention on how knowing *Dao* leads to ethical transformation. In section 1, I explicate Xunzi's concept of *bi* 蔽 (obscurity) and suggests that one's not knowing *Dao* has to do with a certain problematic state of the heart/mind. In section 2, I analyse *xu* 虛 (vacating), *yi* 一 (focusing), and *jing* 靜 (stilling), which are remedial practices for knowing *Dao*, and bring out the importance of discerning *li* 理 for Xunzi. In sections 3 and 4, I propose an interpretation of the relation between *li* 理 and *qing* 情 in the process of ethical transformation. In section 5, I highlight some remaining ambiguities that can be further investigated to deepen our understanding of Xunzi's thought.

Keywords: Xunzi; ritual; ethical transformation; Dao; *li* (pattern); *qing* (feelings)

Introduction

According to Xunzi, human nature is bad (*xing e* 性惡).¹ If the naturally bad inclinations are followed, strife and disorder will ensue. Xunzi compares human nature to a piece of naturally warped wood that can be straightened. Although the substance cannot be changed, its states can be changed (22/28). Through artifice (*wei* 偽), human nature can be moved (8/110-1), modified (23/8), and ethically transformed (23/38), so much so that one will not revert to his initial state (3/34). By “ethical transformation”, I mean one being transformed from the kind of person who is primarily concerned with self-interest (*li* 利) to the kind of person who is primarily concerned with propriety (*yi* 義) (4/18-23), from one who fights with one’s own brother for resources to one who defers food to others (23/18), from one who only desires to gain whatever is beneficial for oneself to one who does not even desire to see what is contrary to the teachings of sages (1/47), from one who not only acts in accordance with *Dao* but also embody the teachings of the sages (1/30-1). In short, one is transformed from the kind of person does not know *Dao* to the kind of person who takes delight in following *Dao*.

There are debates about whether Xunzi has a well thought-out position on *xing*. Some doubts are driven by structure of the *Xunzi* text.² Other doubts are driven by an apparent tension between Xunzi’s view on human nature and other aspects of his thought.³ In this paper, I assume that Xunzi does mean that human nature is bad and use this assumption to generate the question why Xunzi thinks that ethical transformation is possible. Should it turn out to be the case that Xunzi is not committed to the claim that human nature is bad, then the question being posed here will no longer be interesting. But so far, none of the textual evidence presented can decisively undermine Xunzi’s claim that human nature is bad. Eric Hutton (2000), for example, has proposed a plausible interpretation of Xunzi that reconciles Xunzi’s claim that human nature is bad with the difficult passages that seemingly conflict with the claim. I agree with Hutton that we should not too easily explain away parts of the text as interpolations or errors. It is important to take the claims that are recorded in the *Xunzi* text seriously and try to understand how these

claims could fit together in Xunzi's thinking. The present study differs from Hutton's study in that it does not purport to argue that Xunzi has a consistent theory of human nature. Just because we assume that Xunzi means that human nature is bad does not entail that Xunzi can coherently maintain all his claims. Rather, it only seeks to make sense of why ethical transformation is possible given that human nature is bad. If there is a satisfactory way of answering the question, it is more likely that Xunzi's claim that human nature is bad can be defended. If we cannot offer a satisfactory answer, there might be good reason to think that Xunzi does not have a coherent view of human nature after all.

There are two main themes related to ethical transformation in the *Xunzi*. One concerns the transformative effect of ritual (*liyi* 禮義). It is explicitly said in the *Xunzi* that ritual has transformative effect (禮義之化) (23/40-42, 49).⁴ The other concerns the importance of knowing *Dao* to ethical transformation. Compared with the volume of literature on how ritual transforms nature, discussion about how knowing *Dao* can have a transformative effect is relatively scarce. The aim of the present study is to examine in greater detail the connection between knowing *Dao* and ethical transformation. Not only is this issue central to Xunzi's thought, a better understanding of which can in turn help us better understand the connection between ritual and ethical transformation. It should be made clear in the outset that I am not claiming that knowing *Dao* is the only avenue of transformation and personal cultivation. I only assume that knowing *Dao* is playing some role in Xunzi's complex picture of ethical transformation. Since the focus here is not on ritual, I will use "ritual" broadly to refer to all the practices, models, and teachings of the sage kings that are exalted by Xunzi.

1. *Zhi* 知 and *Bi* 蔽

In the *Xunzi*, there is no explicit mention that knowing *Dao* can "hua 化", a term which is often rendered as "transformation" in English. But if we take Xunzi's conception of ethical transformation to be broader than the concept of *hua*, it is not difficult to infer that knowing *Dao* is also necessary for ethical transformation. According to Xunzi, all human beings prefer what benefits the self and desires certain comfortable things in life such as food, shelter, and

relaxation (4/42-3). Having such natural preferences and desires itself does not pose a problem, for they cannot by themselves motivate action. The problem is that the pursuit of object of desires can be wrongly approved (*ke* 可) by the heart/mind (22/67-8). Just like other senses that have their respective objects of preference, the heart/mind also has its natural object of preference, that is, self-interest (*li* 利) (23/25-6).⁵ Xunzi compares the heart/mind to a pan of water, which has the tendency to be attracted to objects of desires (*wu* 物) and becomes “titled” (*qing* 傾) (21/56-8). Unlike the senses though, the heart/mind can deliberate and put a stop to the pursuit of objects of desire. If the heart/mind understands that there are some harmful aspects of pursuing the objects of desires, it will not approve the pursuit (3/45-7). Xunzi discusses the deliberative process of the heart/mind in terms of weighing between options. If the beam (*heng* 衡) and counterweight (*quan* 權)⁶ of the scale on which the heart/mind weighs options is not properly aligned, the heart/mind will be mistaken about what is heavy and what is light (22/71-8). It is only with an accurate scale that one will not be mistaken about the beneficial and harmful aspects of a possible course of action (19/32-3).⁷ In Xunzi’s view, *Dao* is the accurate scale of all times. It is crucial for the heart/mind to know *Dao*, so that it approves what is in accordance with *Dao* (21/29-30; 22/74). We may infer from this that, for Xunzi, it is necessary for one to know *Dao* in order to adopt it as basis of judgement and become transformed. However, it is still unclear why it is the case that when one knows *Dao*, one will be transformed to the kind of person who not only adopts *Dao* as basis of judgement but also desires to follow *Dao* and embodies *Dao*.⁸ One may well know what the rules are and follow the rules without intrinsically valuing the rules. Does the heart/mind have certain affinity with *Dao* such that when it knows *Dao*, it will be inclined to adopt *Dao* as its standard? If the heart/mind has affinity with *Dao*, it would be difficult to make sense of Xunzi’s claim that human nature is bad. If the heart/mind does not have affinity with *Dao*, it would be difficult to explain why, upon knowing *Dao*, one will have the right kind of motivation to follow *Dao*. A good place to start our investigation is to understand more about what is involved in knowing *Dao*.

According to Xunzi, the heart/mind is capable of knowing *Dao* because of its capacity *zhi* 知 (21/34). *Zhi* in the *Xunzi* is usually translated as “knowledge.” Knoblock translates *zhi* as “awareness.” There is one passage that says animals also have *zhi* (9/69). However, Xunzi seems

to mean something more than just awareness when he uses the term *zhi* in relation to knowing *Dao*. According to Xunzi, *zhi* is the distinguishing capacity of the heart/mind. It is in virtue of *zhi* that the heart/mind rules over the physical body (21/44-5) and gives orders to the five senses (17/12). Xunzi posits a difference between being able to register the information supplied by the senses (*zheng zhi*) and being able to offer an explanation of the information supplied by the senses. For Xunzi, only the latter counts as *zhi* (22/19-21). In another passage, it is said that the way horses respond to neighs and oxes respond to lows is not *zhi* because they are naturally constituted this way (3/25). These altogether suggest that *zhi*, being the kind of distinguishing capacity that enables the heart/mind to rule over senses, is more than just reflexive response or basic awareness. It is akin to knowledge or understanding. Even when “*zhi*” is used in the sense that roughly means knowledge, Xunzi seems to be using the term in different senses. The usage of “*zhi*” in the *Xunzi* can be analysed in different ways. We may analyze the different functions of *zhi*, such as reasoning, understanding, and classifying; the different kinds of *zhi*, such as the *zhi* of sages, the *zhi* of common people;⁹ or the different developmental stages of *zhi*, such as a lower-grade *zhi* akin to sensations and a higher-grade *zhi* akin to embodied knowledge.¹⁰ The fine-grained distinctions between different usages and connotations of *zhi* in the *Xunzi*, though important, do not concern us too much here. For our present purpose, we only need to stipulate that *zhi* is a capacity of the heart/mind that enables it to know things,¹¹ that there are superior and inferior kinds of *zhi*,¹² and that the kind that is idealized by Xunzi is one that is directed at knowing *Dao* (e.g. 8/105-7, 27/121).

According to Xunzi, the ideal condition of *zhi* is one that is *ming* 明.¹³ “*Ming*” can be literally translated as “bright” or “illumination.” In the classical texts, *ming* is usually used as an adjective to describe eyesight, in the sense of “clear-sighted.”¹⁴ By extension, *ming* as a noun refers to the ability to see clearly or to a kind of condition that allows one to see clearly. In the *Xunzi*, *ming* is usually used as an adjective to describe what Xunzi regards as a favourable condition of *zhi*.¹⁵ For example, the superior person’s *zhi* is characterised as *ming* and his actions as faultless (1/3). If one’s *zhi* is not *ming*, then one is in a condition wherein her seeing the object of *zhi* is prevented. This suggests that *zhi* has a perceptual aspect.¹⁶ This impression is reinforced

by a connection between *zhi* and a cluster of perceptual terms such as “guan 觀” (observe), “jian 見” (see), and “cha 察” (discern).¹⁷

Understanding the perceptual aspect of *zhi* is helpful to our understanding of what Xunzi regards as the problem of not knowing *Dao*, *bi* 蔽. *Bi* is the contrary state of *zhi*. When one is *bi*, one’s *zhi* is not *ming*. They only see a bend (*qu* 曲)¹⁸ of a greater pattern (21/1). For example, one sees what one likes but not one dislikes, one sees the past but not the future, and vice versa (21/6-7). The meaning of *bi* in the *Xunzi* is variously interpreted in the literature. Yang Liang interprets *bi* as being stuck in a corner as if there is an object obstructing us from getting to the bright side or to the light.¹⁹ Chen Deng-yuan understands “*bi*”, when used transitively with an object, as one’s heart/mind being covered by the object.²⁰ Watson translates “*bi*” as “obsession”, Knoblock as “blindness”, Hutton as “fixation”. These different readings can help us think through the meaning of *bi* in the *Xunzi*. If we follow something like Yang’s and Chen’s readings, then *bi* seems to be a passive state and the problem could have more to do with the heart/mind is being covered by the objects of desires and is prevented from knowing *Dao*. This reading interprets *zhi* in a way that is probably closer to Mencius’s understanding of *bi*. For Mencius, the problem of *bi* pertains only to the senses because the senses do not think (*si* 思). Once the senses interact with their respective sensory objects, they will be passively led away by the objects (6A:15). It is in this sense that the senses can have “*bi*” towards the objects.²¹ Hence, “*bi*” is used in a way that is akin to “being covered” or “beclouded” in the *Mencius*. But in the *Xunzi*, *bi* is a problem that pertains to the heart/mind. For example, it is said that Jie of the Xia dynasty was *bi* towards Mo Xi and Si Guan and that his heart/mind was confused (21/8-9). By contrast, King Tang the Successful learnt from the mistake of Jie and carefully mastered and ordered his heart/mind (21/12-13). It is also said that since the sage kings knows the problem with the heart/mind’s workings and sees the disaster that *bi* can bring about, they uphold *Dao* (21/28-9). These observations suggest that, for Xunzi, *bi* occurs as a result of how the heart/mind is directed, not how the senses are directed. If *bi* is a result of the movement of the heart/mind, then Yang’s and Chen’s readings are not precise enough because they suggest that the heart/mind was passively covered by something or being stuck. Such passivity might be applicable to the senses that cannot direct their movements. But since the heart/mind, in Xunzi’s view, directs itself and

stops itself (21/45), it is difficult to see how the heart/mind cannot get itself out of the state of being covered or being stuck.

Watson's and Hutton's renderings of "bi" as "obsession" is compatible with the idea that it is heart/mind that suffers *bi* but fails to capture the idea that *bi* has to do with lack of *zhi*. "Fixation" and "obsession" suggest that one's *bi* is not necessarily correlated with a lack of knowledge. Though one could be obsessed with or fixated on something because one lacks knowledge, one's obsession or fixation could also be entirely due to feelings. For instance, a doctor could be well aware of the harmful effects of smoking. But since she is overwhelmed by her desire for cigarettes, she cannot resist smoking. Given the linkage between *bi* and not *ming*, we may add that *bi* is more than just being fixated on or obsessed with something.

Knoblock's translation does justice to the partial knowledge aspect of *bi* but does not capture the idea that when one is *bi*, something else is being occluded by what one is *bi* towards. One might have a partial knowledge about *p* but this partial knowledge does not necessarily prevent one from getting more knowledge about *q*. What Xunzi wants to say is that when one has *bi* towards *p*, *p* occludes *q* from her view. For example, when Xunzi criticises the different *bi* of different thinkers, he not only points out their *bi*, he also points out what their *bi* has occluded. For example, Xunzi criticises Zhuangzi has *bi* towards Heaven (*tian* 天) and does not know about human beings; Mozi has *bi* towards utility (*li* 利) and does not know about culture (21/21-23). In light of the above analysis of *bi*, we may understand *bi* as a problematic state of the heart/mind, in which certain aspects of *Dao* are occluded and not known by the heart/mind.

2. *Xu Yi Jing* 虛一靜

According to Xunzi, the remedy to the problem of *bi* is *xu* 虛, *yi* 一, and *jing* 靜, which are exercises that will bring about great clarity and *ming* 大清明 (21/41) and enables one to know *Dao*. Since what concerns us here is what *xu*, *yi*, and *jing* reveal to us about the relation between knowing *Dao* and ethical transformation, I will not go into details about the techniques involved.²² For convenience, I will use the label "*xuyijing*" to facilitate discussion.

"Xu" is defined by Xunzi as:

The heart/mind never stops storing; yet there is what is called *xu*...human beings are born with *zhi*. With *zhi*, there are goals [of the heart/mind] 志. To have a goal is to store something. Not allowing what has been stored to do damage to what is about to receive is called *xu* (21/26).

“Xu” could carry the multiple connotations of vacuity, vacancy, and deficiency.²³ The term “xu” is frequently used in conjunction with *kong* (empty, unfilled)²⁴ and contrasted with *ying* 盈 (surplus, filled) and *shi* 實 (substantial, real).²⁵ Note that *ying* is not just about being filled up but also about being abundant and sufficient. Similarly, *shi* refers to what is real or substantive. Both the concepts *ying* and *shi* require the presence of particular elements. Hence, when *xu* is contrasted with *ying* and *shi*, *xu* should mean the absence of certain elements rather than voidness. In texts around the same period, “xu” is used to denote political or bodily weakness, implying the lack of certain elements in governance or physical health.²⁶ With this connotation of *xu* in mind, we can better understand Xunzi’s concept of *xu*, which is not a kind of absolute emptiness but the absence of what has been stored. For Xunzi, to “xu” one’s mind is to make room in the heart/mind so that what is already in the heart/mind does not obstruct what is about to come. “Yi” is defined as:

The heart/mind knows two aspects of things at the same time; yet there is what is called *yi*...the heart/mind is born with *zhi*. With *zhi*, there are differences. These differences are known at the same time. When these differences are known at the same time, it is to be two-fold...Not allowing that “one” to do damage this “one” is called *yi*. (21/37-8)

Watson and Knoblock translate “yi” as “unity”; Hutton translates “yi” as “single-mindedness.” “Unity” implies that things are brought together to become one; “single-mindedness” can mean devotion to one and only one purpose. However, if we look at Xunzi’s definition of *yi*, the emphasis is on keeping a certain separation between things and not letting one do damage to the other. This is quite different from “unity” or single-minded devotion. Xunzi is probably

acknowledging that the heart/mind is capable of knowing multiple things at the same time but it should not let our understanding of one thing distract our understanding of another. “Jing” is defined as:

Xin never stops moving; yet there is what is called *jing*. Not allowing dreams and fantasies to disrupt knowledge is called *jing*. (21/34-39)

The term “jing” has the connotations of being still and free from disturbances. As Kwong-loi Shun notes, *jing*, in the sense of opposite to *dong*, can mean complete stillness. When *jing* is paired with *qing*, it can mean free from disturbances.²⁷ Xunzi’s definition of *jing* focuses more on the absence of disturbances, such as dreams and fantasies, rather than complete stillness. We can infer that to “jing” one’s mind, in Xunzi’s sense, is to still the heart/mind in such a way that illusory thoughts do not confuse and prevent the heart/mind from knowing things as they are.

Common across the notions of *xu*, *yi*, and *ying* is the emphasis on not letting certain thoughts interfere with our knowing things as they are. Xunzi seems to be drawing a subtle distinction between what one takes to be the case and what is in fact the case. *Xu* is concerned with not letting preconceptions or prior intentions interfere with one’s learning about new things. *Yi* is concerned with not letting what we learnt about one thing to be confused with what we learnt about another thing. *Jing* is concerned with not letting our illusory thoughts confuse us with what is in fact the case. Hence, the practice of *xuyijing* is concerned with training the heart/mind to learn about things as they are without the hindrance of preconceptions, prior knowledge, or illusory thoughts. Xunzi’s main idea about *xuyijing* is that it is by attending to what is in fact the case that we can arrive at knowledge of *Dao*.

It might be tempting to think that since Xunzi emphasizes on not letting what is in the heart/mind hinder *zhi*, there is nothing within the heart/mind that enables one’s knowing of *Dao*. If anything, what is latent in the heart/mind seems to have an undermining effect in one’s obtaining knowledge of *Dao*. This might lead some to think that the transformative effect of knowing *Dao* must be the workings of what lies external to oneself. D. C. Lau, for example, argues that in Xunzi’s thought, one does not find morality from within oneself and that there are

no resources one can draw within oneself.²⁸ Such a reading might be too hasty. There are two separate questions here. One concerns whether one has morality within oneself and the other concerns whether there are some resources within oneself that makes ethical transformation possible. Xunzi clearly does not think that we have morality within ourselves. But do resources from within also play a role in ethical transformation? In order to further fill out Xunzi's picture, we need to turn to the connections between *Dao* and *li* and between *li* and *qing*.

3. *Li* 理

We may start with the question why *xuyijing* enables one to know *Dao*. A clue is the connection between *li* 理 (pattern, principle) and *Dao*. Let us recall Xunzi's point that those who are *bi* do not know the great *li* (21/1). Elsewhere in the same chapter, Xunzi criticises other thinkers' for knowing only one bend (*qu* 曲) and seeing things only from one corner of *Dao* (21/21-4). It is when one practices *xuyijing* and come to know *Dao* that the problem of *bi* can be remedied (21/28-30). These passages suggest that there is a close connection between seeing the great *li* and knowing *Dao*. The following passage says that *xuyijing* is a state of great clarity and brightness, in which one can distinguish things according to the great *li*:

Xu, yi, and jing are called great clarity and brightness 大清明...By penetrating into and inspecting the myriad things, he knows the facts (*qing* 情) of things. By examining and testing order and disorder, he is fully conversant with their limits. By laying out the warp and woof of Heaven and Earth, he tailors the functions of the myriad things. By regulating and distinguishing according the great *li* (*da li* 大理),²⁹ he encompasses everything in space and time.³⁰ (K 21.5e; 21/41-43)

Since *xuyijing* is what enables the heart/mind to know *Dao*, and since *xuyijing* is a state in which one can discern *li*, the connection between seeing *li* and knowing *Dao* is obvious. Moreover, the imagery of the heart/mind being in a state of clarity and brightness echoes the passage where Xunzi compares the heart/mind to a pan of water. It is said that if the water on top is still and

clear, one can see their beard and eyebrows and discern the *li* of their face (21/55). Given that a state in which one can discern *li* is also a state that enables one to know *Dao*, let us probe into the connection between discerning *li* and knowing *Dao*.

The character *li* is comprised of two radicals: the left side refers to jade and the right side refers to divided field. According to Paul Demiéville, the term “li” was originally concerned with dividing land into lots.³¹ In its earliest occurrence, *li* in the *Shijing* appears in the sentence “wo qiang wo *li* 我疆我理”³² to mean putting land into order. In the other three occurrences of *li* in the *Shijing*, *li* refers to handling and regulating land.³³ The same expression of “qiang *li* 疆理” also occurs in the *Zuo zhuan*, in which the ancient kings are said to *qiang li*^{verb} the land in accordance with what is suitable for its produce so as to distribute its benefits.³⁴ Kung Ying-da (孔穎達) makes the observation that *li* has to do with distinguishing which lot is suitable for which grain.³⁵ It is palpable that *li* is acquiring the connotation of making appropriate differentiations. According to the *Shuowen*, *li* means polishing jade. As a noun, *li* means the veins or the patterns in jade. In the Warring States texts, *li* is also often linked to jade. As Wing-tsit Chan notes, both the *Yinwenzi* and the *Hanfeizi* understand jade as a piece of crude stone that has been dressed.³⁶ Since one has to follow the veins and properties inherent in the jade in order to polish jade, the association of *li* with polishing jade further introduces a sense of putting things into order by taking into account the pattern or structure of a thing. “Li” has probably therefore evolved to have the connotation of pattern or structure of a thing. In *Mencius* 5B:1, for example, *li* is used to mean the harmonious pattern of music.

In light of the above observations, we can infer two closely related connotations of *li*. One is about putting things into order, and the other is about dealing with things as they are. These two connotations are inseparable. If the jade is not dressed, it is only a piece of crude stone. This suggests that the emphasis is not just on the things as they are but on the activity of ordering things. While the ordering aspect of *li* captures the aspect about human involvement, the facts of things are also integral to *li* because they provide the basis for the activities of putting things into order. Although dressing jade is a human activity, it is not entirely up to humans to decide how this activity is to be carried out. If one does not observe and pay attention to the characteristic facts of the crude stone, one will not do a good job of dressing jade. What makes a difference

between someone who *li*^{verb} and someone who just arbitrarily organizes things is that the former works with the characteristic facts of a thing. In order to put things into order, it is important for one to observe the characteristic features of things. Hence, we may understand that “li”, as a verb, to mean putting things into order by observing and working within the boundaries of certain characteristic facts of things; as a noun, “li” means the pattern that allows things to be put into order. Hence, the concept *li* encapsulates an interdependency between what is factual about a thing and the human activities performed on that thing.³⁷

In the *Xunzi*, there is also a connection between *li* and order (*zhi* 治). For example, Xunzi defines goodness (*shan* 善) in terms of *li* and order (*zhi* 治) (23/37). When “li” is used verbally, it means putting things into order, when used as adjective, “li” means orderly. There are numerous references to a superior person who *li*^{verb} the myriad things (e.g. 9/66). It is said that if there is no superior person, Heaven and Earth is not *li*^{adjective} (*Xunzi* 9/65-6). When “li” is used a noun, it means “pattern”. In the generic sense, “li” in the text refers to the pattern of one’s face (21/56-7) or the patterns that a needle follows (26/27). It is sometimes couples with the term “wen 文” to mean the “design and pattern” of a thing (26/1). In a more specific sense, “li” refers to the pattern in virtue of which an ethical person follows to give order to things. Xunzi maintains that if what the heart/mind approves is in accordance with *li*, there will be order (22/60-1). Actions that lead to disorder are condemned by Xunzi as “messing up *li* 亂理.”³⁸ It is said that actions that depart from *li* will put one in danger (22/79)³⁹ and should be abandoned (8/31-32). According to Xunzi, a person of propriety treads *li* (義者循理). Since *Dao* is what a person of propriety follows, we may infer that there is a connection between how well one discerns *li* and how well one is able to follow *Dao*.⁴⁰

We are now in a better position to understand why *xuyijing* enables one to know *Dao*. Recall that one who suffers from *bi* and does not know *Dao* is shut off from the great *li* (21/1). For Xunzi, the heart/mind is like a pan of water. It is by first *xuyijing* one’s heart/mind that one can come to see *li* and know *Dao*. If the heart/mind is in a state of *xuyijing*, one can see things clearly as they are and come to discern the great *li* (21/41-3). Xunzi’s point, I suggest, is this: it is important to observe the facts of things and discern the pattern (*li*) that allows one to order things. In light of such pattern, one can derive a set of standards, *Dao*, that guide one to determine right

and wrong (21/56-7) and bring about order. This helps us better understand why Xunzi thinks that *Dao* is the warp and *li* (pattern) of order (22/40-1).⁴¹

So far, by bringing *li* into the picture, it does not answer why one can be ethically transformed from discerning *li* and knowing *Dao*. As David Nivison formulates the question: “Even supposing that the ‘moral’ order really is moral and that I can come to accept it as such, how could the moral order have come into being as a human possession at all—again, supposing that we want to give a plausible naturalistic account, and avoid simply assuming *ad hoc* that it was *given* to humans.”⁴² One could interpret Xunzi as saying that there is some morally neutral capacity of the heart/mind, *zhi*, in virtue of which we can understand things as they are and discern a pattern that allows us to work out a way that best fulfil our goals. One initially acts in accordance with *Dao* out of self-interest but in the course of acting in accordance with *Dao*, one comes to appreciate the intrinsic value of following *Dao*. Ivanhoe (2000), for example, argues that we initially use study of the *Dao* as a tool to serve our needs and desires. As we come to understand more about features of human beings and the world, we come to see that *Dao* is intrinsically valuable. But this does not answer why knowing *Dao* can have lead to ethical transformation. It only re-invites the question by giving us a “before and after” contrast. We learn that before transformation, one follows *Dao* out of self-interest. Somehow, an ethical transformation happens, which leads to one’s appreciation of the intrinsic value of *Dao*. The pressing question is: Why is it the case that by understanding the facts and discerning *li*, one not only comes to know *Dao* but also becomes ethically transformed?

4. *Qing* 情

It is important to keep in mind that the *li* that underlies *Dao* is the *li* that best orders *human* affairs. For Xunzi, *Dao* is neither the way of Heaven nor the way of Earth, but the way that enables human beings to travel along (8/24). When one discerns the *li* that is relevant to knowing *Dao*, it must be a pattern about human facts. In other words, it is by understanding the characteristic facts about human feelings and discerning *li* that one can know *Dao*. In Xunzi’s terms, these characteristic facts about human beings are called *qing* 情. As A. C. Graham notes,

“qing” when it is used as noun means “facts” in early Chinese texts.⁴³ Xunzi’s usages of “qing” to some extent retain this usage in early texts. Xunzi defines *qing* as “inborn feelings of likes and dislikes, feelings of happiness, anger, sadness, and joy” (22/3). The term “qing” that appears in the above quote is usually understood as “emotion.”⁴⁴ However, Xunzi’s usage of *qing* could be quite different from the usage of “emotion” in ordinary English. It is not obvious that *qing* refers to mental states that can give rise to action or to a range of phenomena that can be viewed independently of a subject. In another passage, the *qing* of human beings is presented as what all people will do in certain situations, such as dusting their caps when they have just washed their hair (3/25-6). Xunzi often speaks of human beings as having a common *qing* such that they all desire the same things, such as wealth and the prestige of the son of Heaven (4/72, 11/23-4). Hence, although *qing* does mean feelings, the emphasis is still on the feelings that are characteristic of human beings to have.

Another common reading of *qing* is “disposition”.⁴⁵ If we take “disposition” to mean something like “overall tendencies to feel certain ways,”⁴⁶ it is also unclear that “qing” as such has the connotation of “tendency to feel”. There is clearly a connection between someone’s *qing* and what one’s affective response will be in certain given circumstances. But the response, by Xunzi’s definition, is *yu* 欲 (desire).⁴⁷ This only suggests that there is a semantic link between *qing* and *yu* but it is unclear if *qing* has the connotation of being disposed to feel a certain way. This distinction is important because if *qing* only means feelings that humans have, it is unlikely that *qing* can be changed in Xunzi’s view; but if *qing* means disposition, Xunzi probably also thinks that *qing* can be changed and redirected. A passage in the *Xunzi* says that when Tang and Wu ruled, people followed them and there was order; when Jie and Zhou ruled, people followed them and there was chaos. One way to understand the point of this passage is that *qing* can become either like the former or the latter, thus supporting the reading of *qing* as “disposition”;⁴⁸ another way to understand this passage is that *qing* as such is compatible with either the way of sage kings or the tyrants, thus supporting the reading of *qing* as “feelings that humans have”. The latter reading is more plausible because the main point of the preceding lines and the subsequent lines is that human beings have something in common. For example, when they are hungry, they desire food (4/42-3); for food, they desire pasture and grain-fed animals. Xunzi calls this the *qing*

of human beings (4/60). What differentiates superior people and petty people is how they act in light of their *qing*. It is suggested that if one has the *zhi* of a benevolent (*ren* 仁) person, then, there would not be any harm even if tyrants were in power. But if one has poor *zhi*, even if sage kings were in power, there would not be any advantage. This seems to suggest that what makes a difference to order and disorder is how well one's *zhi* is, not how one's *qing* can be changed. Moreover, throughout the text, Xunzi makes reference to how *qing* can be matched (稱情) (19/93), straightened out and adorned (矯飾) (23/8), or tamed and transformed (擾化) (23/8) but not how *qing* can be changed. Although Xunzi does talk about how *qing* can be “transformed”, *hua*, he defines *hua* as: “Where the appearance changes, and yet there is no distinction in what is substantial but are regarded as different” (22/28). The emphasis is how the way *qing* presents itself can be changed but not what is substantial about *qing* can be changed. This suggests that, Xunzi understands *qing* as certain deep-seated characteristic features of human beings that are difficult to be changed in a substantial way. This explains why Xunzi only talks about modifying and adorning *qing* but not changing *qing*. Just like a piece of crooked wood, although it can be straightened, the substance and character of the wood remains unchanged. This is not to deny that *qing* can be shaped. In the following, I will elaborate more on the distinction between “being shaped” and “being reshaped”. Before we do that, let us make clear how the preceding discussion of *qing* is connected to Xunzi's conception of *li*.

By bringing *qing* into the picture, we are now in a better position to understand the link between *qing* and *li* in Xunzi's thought. In the *Xunzi*, it is said that the sages, who have knowledge of *Dao*, can differentiate the *qing* of myriad things and set them in order (*li*) (3/17-8). In another passage, Xunzi discusses how the sage is able to “use *qing* to gauge *qing* 以情度情” because the underlying *li* is the same (5/35).⁴⁹ The idea is probably that since *qing* are facts about human beings, when the sage attends to his own *qing*, he can also use that to gauge others' *qing*. In doing so, he can discern the pattern in virtue of which *qing* can be given expression in a way that promotes orderly interactions. For example, it is the *qing* of human beings that when one's parents passed away one would feel sad. In light of this, the sages introduce mourning practices that encourage one to express their grief but also put a limit on how far one can go to express their grief so that one does not excessively express one's grief to a point that it becomes

disruptive. It is in this sense that we may speak of “patterning *qing*.” This is different from interpretations that argue that *qing* itself can be reshaped and reformed into ethically appropriate feelings. On Aaron Stalnaker’s reading, for example, “ritual can reshape *qing* so that it is disposed toward desires and actions that accord with *wenli* 文理.”⁵⁰ “The forms and patterns of ritual cut and stretch the emotions, pushing and pulling our disposition into a new form that will more spontaneously tend toward humaneness, reverence, and justice.”⁵¹ The proposed reading agrees that *qing* can be shaped in accordance with *li* so that the expression of which will bring out order. However, it does not go further to claim that *qing* themselves can be reshaped. There is a difference between saying that *qing* can be shaped and *qing* can be reshaped. “Reshaping” presupposes that there was a pre-existing problematic shape that needs to be changed, but Xunzi is empathic that *qing* itself has nothing to do with order and disorder (22/57). The former does not presuppose that there was a pre-existing shape. “Shaping” can be taken to mean that there was an indeterminate shape, which can be shaped and patterned into something that acquires a certain disposition. For example, a block of wood does not have any disposition to turn into a bowl. But once it is crafted into a bowl, it will acquire some dispositions, such as collecting water. This is not to say that the block of wood itself does not have any disposition. For example, it will still burn when it is set on fire. But the disposition that the block of wood has before its being shaped is not a product of its being shaped in a certain way but a product of nature. Hence, the issue of reshaping does not arise for Xunzi. What matters is that *qing* is shaped in the right way so that one is disposed to orderly actions. Although Xunzi has said that human *qing* and nature needs to be straightened and tamed (Xunzi 23), he does not seem to think that it is to be achieved by doing violence, restraining, or repressing *qing*. Such reading would go against Xunzi emphasis that “the count of *qing* 情之數” has nothing to do with matters of order and disorder (Xunzi 22). Another plausible reading is that the straightening and taming of *qing* is achieved by guiding and

In light of these textual observations, we may interpret the connections among *xuyijing*, *li*, *qing*, and knowing *Dao* as follows: Through the exercises of *xuyijing*, one can come to observe things as they are. Once one has an accurate picture of things as they are, one can work out the *li* that put things into order. *Qing* are facts about human beings. When one practices *xuyijing*, one

can know facts about human beings and discern the pattern/a pattern⁵² that brings order to human affairs. This fits with Xunzi's idea that in the state of *xuyijing*, one can know the *qing* of things, work out the great *li*, and put the myriad things into order (21/41-43). Although one's nature and *qing* cannot be changed, there is a certain pattern that will allow *qing* to be expressed in a way that promotes order. Once one discern this pattern, one can derive prescriptions and standards that allows for the expression of *qing* in a way that also promotes order and avoids chaos. This set of prescriptions and standards is *Dao*. Since *Dao* is derived from the pattern, if one's *qing* is patterned, one is no longer in a state that only seeks after self-interest but in a state that identifies with *Dao*.

On the proposed reading, *xuyijing* is not merely about knowing something that is external to oneself. Wei Zheng-tong, for example, holds that the heart/mind in Xunzi is clearly a heart/mind of cognition 認知心 and the object of reflection is the "objective" *Dao*.⁵³ Chad Hansen thinks that *xuyijing* is about looking "outward" to "the correct *dao*."⁵⁴ On the proposed interpretation, the object of reflection is *qing* and the *li* that makes ordering *qing* possible. It is difficult to draw a dichotomy between "objective" or "subjective" because the *qing* is both within oneself and also shared by other human beings. Since *qing* are facts about human beings that are also instantiated in oneself, *xuyijing* is also about knowing facts about oneself. Like Mencius, Xunzi also thinks that there are resources within oneself that makes ethical transformation possible. But unlike Mencius, he does not think that the internal resources are innate moral feelings, nor feelings congenial to be shaped into moral feelings.⁵⁵ Rather, the internal resources are simply human feelings. The proposed interpretation does not appeal to feelings of a particular sort that is especially prone to be shaped into moral feelings. It also does not appeal to natural other-regarding feelings or concerns.⁵⁶ Although Xunzi does think that humans naturally love their own kin (19/100), it is unclear that these feelings are necessarily other-regarding.⁵⁷ The proposed interpretation avoids the difficulty of explaining how Xunzi can maintain both the claims that human nature is bad and that human beings naturally have other-regarding feelings.

5. Remaining Ambiguities

Even if it is the case that everyone has *qing* that can be patterned, there is still the question as to how one's own *qing* can be patterned. Again, given human nature is bad, one does not necessarily have the inclination to have one's own *qing* patterned even if one knows the *li* that can pattern *qing*. There are four possible responses to this question that are guided by two related questions. The first question is whether Xunzi thinks that there is only one way to pattern *qing*. The second question is whether discerning *li* comes before or after *qing* is patterned.

Assuming that the answer to the question whether there is only one *li* underlying *qing* is affirmative, there are two possible responses. (1) There is a pre-existing *li* that resides in *qing*. Once one exercises *zhi* and discerns the *li* of *qing*, one will resonate with *li* because it is something that resides in one's own *qing*. Such resonance will lead to ethical transformation. What is required is learning and understanding the *li* of human beings by observing other people's *qing*. Coming to see the general *li* of human *qing* can somehow bring out the *li* that is already latent in oneself. One important consideration against this interpretation is its corollary that human beings are already predisposed with some moral resources, even though these resources do not have propensity to manifest themselves without the prompting of moral training. Once one comes to discern the *li* of human *qing*, the *li* residing in her *qing* will resonate and be brought out, motivating her to follow *Dao*. This implies that moral goodness after all comes from some latent moral potentiality. The role of artifice, then, is to serve as an external impetus to bring out the source of morality within. This does not fit well with Xunzi's claim that one does not have goodness within oneself (23/33). It also does not fit well with Xunzi's craft metaphors, which say that moral standards are produced by the deliberate effort of the sages, just like how craftsmen create utensils. There is no suggestion that the wood is already veined in a certain way that indicates to the craftsman what to make. Although this possibility has difficulty making sense of certain elements in Xunzi's thought, it cannot be completely ruled out at this point because it does not outright contradict Xunzi's view that human nature is bad. It still says that our *xing* and *qing* are what need to be worked upon and that without artifice, our *qing* will never be ordered. (1) leaves open the possibility that Xunzi's claim that human nature is bad should be construed as a weaker claim that allows latent moral resources residing in one's nature.

(2) Suppose that there is only one way to pattern *qing*. The second possible response is that the sages have a superior kind of knowledge that enables them to see the *li* that best orders *qing*. On the basis of the *li* of *qing*, the sages devise a system of ritual practices that are conducive to patterning people's *qing*. As long as people follow the sages' teachings and practice ritual, their *qing* will be patterned. Once their *qing* are patterned, they will resonate with *Dao* and become motivated to follow *Dao*. (2) does not ascribe any moral potentiality to human beings. It also does not assume that knowing the *li* of human *qing* has some pull on one's own *qing*. A consideration against this reading is that it regards sages as a special class of people that has superior *zhi* and access to the *li* in virtue of which *qing* can be patterned. This reading does not do justice to Xunzi's thought that sages and common people have the same *xing* (23/29) and that even a layperson can become a sage (23/62-68). However, the issue concerning the status of sages is a contentious one. Xunzi could be saying that sages and common people have the same capacity *zhi* but only the sages are able to exercise their *zhi* in a superior way (23/69-75). As Kim-chong Chong insightfully points out, it could be the case that the sages and common might share the basic cognitive capacity but the sages may possess some distinctive quality that the common people do not possess. This is like saying that a carpenter might have the capacity to be a trader but lacks the ability to do so because he lacks certain distinctive quality of the trader, such as sagacity.⁵⁸

Assuming that the answer to the question whether there is only one *li* underlying *qing* is negative, there are two possible responses. (3) Given *qing* are brute facts about human beings and are quite resistant to change, one can through their capacity *zhi* figure out a way to pattern *qing* (*Dao*) that leads to order and long-term satisfaction. It is in one's self-interest to follow *Dao*, have one's own *qing* patterned, and become ethically transformed. On this reading, maximising self-interest would be the initial reason for one to follow *Dao*. One might argue that in order to be ethically transformed, one needs to be the kind of person whose focus is on *Dao*, rather than on self-interest. This worry does not pose too much difficulty for (3) because given human beings are constituted a certain way, once they immerse themselves in ritual and the teachings of the sages, their *qing* will just be patterned. If one comes to see that following *Dao* yield the most satisfaction, they can get themselves to sign up for ritual and learning so that they

eventually will be transformed to the kind of person who takes delight in following *Dao*. We may consider an analogous case. One sees a reason to have her memory removed. It is just the case that by going through certain medical procedure, her memory will be removed, including the reason why she has her memory removed. All Xunzi needs to have assumed is that ritual, like the medical procedure, has an effect on human psychology because the way human beings is constituted. Once one's *qing* is patterned, one no longer has self-interest as their primary goal and have following *Dao* as a goal instead.⁵⁹ This line of thought is similar to what Nivison calls "a *consequentialist* argument for 'adopting' a deontological moral position."⁶⁰

There are a number of textual considerations in favor of (3).⁶¹ On (3), knowing *Dao* involves getting people to see the big picture and be rational so that they understand what is in fact the most effective way of achieving what they want. It is supported by passages that discuss *zhi* in terms of how well one understands which is the most effective way of satisfying one's desire. There is a passage in the "Rong Ru" chapter that contrasts two people. The person with shallow *zhi* consumes all his food extravagantly and finds himself begging in a narrow ditch. By contrast, someone who deliberates about the long-term consequences does not live extravagantly. It is not that the latter does not have desire for good food and luxurious clothes. It is just that he understands how to conduct himself appropriately so that he can live a satisfying life in the long run (4/63-6). Elsewhere, Xunzi criticizes those who do not follow *Dao* as not understanding the count of things and exchanging two for one (22/73). They foolishly give up desires they have accumulated for a long time for momentary satisfaction (22/72-77). This implies that those who follow *Dao* are those who can give up momentary satisfaction for greater satisfaction. Xunzi seems to have assumed that human beings all share some common psychological features in virtue of which they will take delight in following *Dao*. According to Xunzi, all human beings have security and honour as their objects of desire and yet, only those who have attained *Dao* can have great security (大安) and great honour (大榮) (11/1).⁶² Xunzi also draws an analogy between taking delight in *Dao* and taking delight in fine food. A person who had never encountered fine meat and grains before would consider these as "strange things" when they first saw them. But after they have tasted them, they would realise they are indeed pleasant to the senses and would from then on choose the fine food and abandon the food they used to have

(4/52-5). Since *Dao* is derived from the *li* that best patterns *qing*, following *Dao* facilitates the expression of psychological features that are characteristic of human beings in an orderly manner. If one does not follow *Dao*, one's expression of *qing* is likely to lead to disorder, thus frustrating the expression of *qing* in turn. This is probably why Xunzi thinks that following *Dao* actually entails greater satisfaction.⁶³

Perhaps the difficulty with (3) is not that it is incompatible with Xunzi's view that following *Dao* is indeed satisfying for the individual. It might well be the case that following *Dao* is in fact what is good for the agent or what brings about the best satisfaction of desires. The difficulty with (3) rather has to do with its implication that following *Dao* would require a reason, that is, self-interest. There is no clear indication that, for Xunzi, following *Dao* is something that an agent has to have a reason and make up her mind to do. It could be the case one simply does what ritual requires out of social pressure; but once she experiences ritual, her *qing* will be patterned, thus coming to identify with *Dao*. That said, a voluntaristic way of thinking might not be entirely alien to the intellectual context of the time.⁶⁴ However, even if one needs a reason to follow *Dao*, it is unclear that self-interest can be the agent's reason for following *Dao*. On (3), before one comes to decide to follow *Dao*, one has to first see the point of following *Dao*, that is, it best satisfies one's total set of desires. Then, one makes up one's mind and choose following *Dao* as an end in itself. However, there is no strong textual evidence that shows that one can have self-interest as *her reason* to follow *Dao*. Even if following *Dao* indeed brings about the best satisfaction for an agent, it does not mean that from the agent's perspective, one can have satisfying self-interest as a reason to choose *Dao*. It might be the case that the nature of following *Dao* is such that it is paradoxical for one to have maximizing self-interest as a reason that motivates her to follow *Dao*. This is analogous to a case where an employer might want to offer a well-paid job only to someone who does not have earning high salary as a reason for taking the job. We may imagine that someone is attracted to the high salary and she also knows that she will not get the job if she has earning high salary as a reason for taking the job. She might get herself to apply for the job and trick herself to forget about the salary of the job so that when she accepts the job, she is no longer concerned with the salary. Suppose the employer finds out that the reason that motivates her to take the job in the first place

is the high salary of the job, the employer would deem her ineligible, even though she herself has forgotten about the salary of the job.

(4) The fourth possible response is that the sages encountered special circumstances and accumulated enough experiences such that they have worked out an effective way of patterning human *qing*. Like what is suggested in (2), when one follows and engages in the practices devised by the sages, one's *qing* will be patterned and therefore is in a suitable condition to know *Dao* and intrinsically value *Dao*. Given human psychology is a certain way, as long as one follows the ritual practices the sages devised on the basis of *li*, one's *qing* will be patterned. This reading preserves the idea in (1) that it takes one's own *li* to resonate with the *li* of human *qing* in order for one to be ethically transformed. It is just that the resonance does not occur as a result of some *li* that is naturally residing in *qing* but as a result of the sages' working out a *li* that most effectively patterns human *qing*. Since an individual also shares human *qing* that the sages have taken account to, one will resonate with the *li* when one's *qing* is patterned. (4) avoids the problem we have seen with (1), for it is not committed to the claim that human beings have moral predispositions. Similarly, *qing* itself does not have any moral inclination. But once *qing* is patterned, one is in a state that resonates with *Dao*. A corollary of (4) is that one has to be first trained by ritual before one can be in the right state to know *Dao* and follow *Dao*. (4) seems to be a plausible interpretation, but since interpretations (1) to (3) cannot be entirely ruled out and the assumption that there is not a definite way of patterning *li* is not defended, we are unable to arrive at a definitive conclusion here.

The abovementioned four possible readings have significant implications for two important issues in Xunzi's thought. One has to do with the connection between discerning *li* and patterning *qing*. As discussed earlier, some scholars take *bi* to mean obsession, which suggests that the problem is more of an affective one. Other interpreters take *bi* to mean a lack of knowledge, which suggests that the problem is more of a cognitive one. On the proposed interpretation, the problem is both affective and cognitive but the direction between these two are unclear. Is it the case that when one is *bi*, one's *qing* will be disorderly so that one cannot discern *li* or is it because one cannot discern *li* and therefore one's *qing* is not patterned? On readings (1) and (3), Xunzi would have assumed that it is by first discerning *li* that one's *qing* can be

patterned. Hence, ethical training should focus on helping one discern *li*. Discerning *li* can lead to the patterning of *qing*, for one can somehow resonate with or see the benefit of following *Dao*. This implies that there is still some gap between knowing *Dao* and following *Dao*. On (2) and (4) it is by first having *qing* patterned that one can come to discern *li* and know *Dao*. Since *qing* is patterned, one has internalized *Dao* and is therefore positioned to identify with *Dao*. Hence, ethical training should focus on patterning human feelings, although this in effect is also a process of getting someone to see *li*. On this reading, knowing *Dao* is following *Dao*.

Another related issue is the role of the sages. If (1) or (3) is right, then the ritual practices devised by the sages are more like a guidebook or shortcut that helps people get to the stage of being ethical transformed faster. Even if human nature is bad, given that human beings have *li* residing in their *qing* or they are self-interested, there is still some likelihood that one can bring out or work out the *li* in virtue of one's *zhi*, albeit it will take more time and effort. If (2) or (4) is right, then the ritual devised by sages are almost indispensable to ethical transformation. Given that human nature is bad, it is extremely unlikely that one's *qing* will become patterned without the intervention of ritual. In order to adjudicate among these possibilities, we need an investigation into how, in Xunzi's view, the sages work out the ritual that can pattern *qing*. If the sages has superior intelligence that enables them to discover the *li*, there is more support for (1) or (3). If the sages, by circumstantial luck, have encountered events that first pattern their *qing* and set them in a conducive condition to obtain knowledge of *Dao*, there is more support for (2) or (4). This is a topic that will be reserved for another investigation.

My strategy has been one that tries to understand Xunzi's view in a way that maximally preserves the coherence between his claims by extracting assumptions that Xunzi would need to make in order for him to be consistent. It is possible that Xunzi himself might not be fully aware of these assumptions and their implications. Although we cannot at this point fully explain the connection between knowing *Dao* and ethical transformation due to the abovementioned ambiguities, the link between knowing *Dao* and ethical transformation we have established so far is still significant. On the proposed interpretation, ethical standards (*Dao*) are derived from a pattern (*li*) that allows characteristically human features (*qing*) to be expressed in a way that leads to order. When one practises *xuyijing*, one comes to discern the *li* that allows human *qing*

to be patterned. This *li* of human *qing* can somehow resonate with *li* that is within oneself because each member of humankind shares the same set of characteristics. It is in virtue of this resonance that one is motivated to not only act in accordance with *Dao* but also embody *Dao*. The ambiguities remain unresolved in this study gesture towards areas of studies that can further our understanding of Xunzi as well as Confucian thought in general.

Notes

All in-text references are to the chapter and line numbers in *Xunzi yinde* 荀子引|得. For its corresponding English translations by Knoblock and Hutton, see the cross-referencing table in Hutton 2014: 345-357. All references to Knoblock's translations are to the chapter and section numbers.

All references to the *Guanzi* are to chapter, page, and line numbers in *Zhuzi jicheng*. All references to the *Guoyu* are to the volume, section, and page numbers in Xu Yuangao comp., *Guoyu jijie*. All references to the *Lunyu* are to book and passage numbers in Yang Bo-jun trans., *Lunyu yizhu*. All references to *Lushichunqiu* are to book and chapter numbers in John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel trans., *The Annals of Lu Buwei*. All references to the *Yijing* are to the commentaries and the *Ta Chuan* (TC) sections in Richard Wilhelm trans., *The I Ching*. All references to *Zuozhuan* are to the volume and page numbers in Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu zuozhuanzhu*.

¹ Xunzi understands *xing* (human nature) as: "That which is so from birth is called *xing*. That which is generated out of the harmony of *xing*, merges with the quintessential, is aroused and responds, is not worked at but is so is called *xing*." (*Xunzi* 22/2-3; Cf. K 22.1b); "*Xing* is what brought to fruition by Heaven" (*Xunzi* 22/63; Cf. K 22.5b); "What cannot be learned, cannot be worked at, and yet resides in humans is called *xing*." (*Xunzi* 23/12; Cf. K 23.1c) Xunzi understands *e* (bad) as: "What is called *e* is being partial, dangerous, contrary to the right, and disorderly." (*Xunzi* 23/37; Cf. K 23.3). In this article, I will use the term "human nature" to refer to Xunzi's own definition of "*xing*" and the term "bad" to his definition of *e*.

² For example, Dan Robins's textual analysis of the "Xing e" chapter suggests that the claim that "human nature is bad" is not central to the text. According to Robins, Xunzi's position on human nature changed over time and eventually got replaced by his account of artifice. (See Robins's, 2001, for a study of the centrality of the "*xing e*" claim in Xunzi's philosophy. See also Hutton, 2011, for a critique of Robins's study.)

³ For example, Donald Munro (1996) identifies several passages in the *Xunzi* that seem to be inconsistent with Xunzi's claim that human nature is bad. One often discussed passage that makes trouble for Xunzi's view on human nature is one that says human beings have *yi* (義), which is usually translated as a "sense of duty" or "inner moral sense." These seemingly inconsistent claims might invite the impression that Xunzi is not serious in developing a theory of human nature or that he has an incoherent view on human nature. More recently, Janghee Lee (2005) argues that Xunzi's view on *xing* is incoherent and what he actually means is that *xing* is neither good nor bad.

⁴ In previous studies, I have analyzed the relation between ritual and ethical transformation [Reference deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process].

⁵ See [name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process] for detailed discussion of the heart/mind's preference of self-interest and its natural inclination to pursue objects of desire.

⁶ I translate "quan 權" and "heng 衡" respectively as "counterweight" and "beam of the balance." The *Shuowen* explains *quan* in terms of *chui* 錘, which is a heavy metal block that is used as weight units, and *heng* as a wooden crossbar fixed between horns of oxen. Because of the connotation of wooden crossbar, *heng* can also be used to refer to the arm of a weighing apparatus. These observations altogether suggest that the kind of balance that Xunzi has in mind is a steelyard balance that comprises of a balance beam and a counterweight that slides along that the beam to counterbalance the load of the object being weighed.

⁷ In the text, it is said that: “If the beam of balance is genuinely hung, then it is not possible to deceive about lightness or heaviness. The scale is the acme of flatness (*ping* 平).” Knoblock translates “ping” as “equality” and Watson translates it as “fairness.” I give a literal translation of “ping” as “flatness” because it is used to describe the beam of a scale. When the beam is flat, it means the steelyard is balanced so that the weight of the object being weighed can be obtained. This is consistent with Xunzi’s emphasis on getting the weight of an object right rather than on being equal or fair. I follow Watson in translating 至 as “acme” (Watson 2003: 99).

⁸ This problem has been eloquently formulated by David Wong so I will not rehearse here. See especially Wong, 2000, pp. 139-147.

⁹ See Ho Shu-ching’s detailed analysis of the different objects of and kinds of *zhi* in the *Xunzi* in Ho, 2014, Ch. 3.

¹⁰ See Liao Ming-chun’s analysis of developmental stages of *zhi* in Liao, 1994, Ch. 6 section 4.

¹¹ “Zhi” in the text sometimes means a mere capacity that enables one to know things. It is in this sense that Xunzi speaks of the distinguishing capacity of heart/mind that allows heart/mind to form an understanding of things in a way that the senses cannot (e.g. 22/19-21). It is also in this sense of *zhi* that Xunzi says humans are all born with the capacity *zhi* (21/36) and that the petty person and the superior person have the same ability to *zhi* (4/32-3).

¹² There are *zhi* of the sages and the superior person, and also *zhi* of the petty person and of the servant (23/77-8).

¹³ E.g. *Xunzi* 3/16-20, 4/36-37, 21/42-44.

¹⁴ E.g. *Lunyu* 16.10; *Zuozhuan zhonggong* 27/1488; *Xunzi* 23/14.

¹⁵ E.g. *Xunzi* 17/25, 18/105.

¹⁶ I am indebted to Kwong-loi Shun for a helpful discussion on *zhi*.

¹⁷ E.g. *Xunzi* 21/40-42; K 21.5d. I am indebted to Jeremy Tanner for alerting me to this point.

¹⁸ According to *Shuowen*, *qu* refers to a curved object. Here, it is most likely to be referring to the curvy part of a pattern.

¹⁹ Wang, 1988, vol. 2, p. 386.

²⁰ Chen, 1935, p. 161.

²¹ I thank Kwong-loi Shun for a helpful discussion on this point.

²² There are studies that seek to understand the techniques involved in *xu*, *yi*, and *ji* and also studies that examine the Daoist influences Xunzi might have received. Aaron Stalnaker (2003), for example, has done a thorough examination of the possible Daoist influences Xunzi has received from Zhuangzi and Guanzi. Stalnaker also notes that it is possible for “er 而” in “xu yi er jing” to denote a kind of sequential order as in it is through *xu* and *yi* that *jing* can be obtained.

²³ *Xu* might also take on the connotation of weakness or falsity. However, given Xunzi’s definition, it is unlikely that Xunzi’s concept of *xu* has these two connotations.

²⁴ E.g., *Lushi chunqiu* 18/6.3; *Guoyu* 19/9/555; *Mengzi* 7B:12.

²⁵ E.g., *Yijing* 23, 41, 55; *Lunyu* 7:26, *Guanzi* 26/158/14.

²⁶ E.g. *Liushichunqiu* 3/5.2, 8/4.2, 18/6.3.

²⁷ Shun, 2006, pp. 198-9.

²⁸ Lau, 1953, p. 564.

²⁹ Wing-tsit Chan, for example, understands “da li” as “the great principle,” which he distinguishes from the “principle of the world” (1964, p.126). However, it is unclear whether Xunzi has used “da li” as a singular term to mean an overarching principle that governs all things. It seems that “da (great)” is simply used as an adjective to modify *li*, meaning a larger or more comprehensive pattern of things. There is insufficient textual evidence for the reading that *li* is a pattern of nature or some ultimate principle.

³⁰ I have consulted and modified Knoblock’s translation here. Following Yang Liang, I take 裏 to be 理.

³¹ See Wing-tsit Chan’s discussion of Demiéville’s view (1964, p.123).

³² *Shijing* 2/6/6.

³³ *Shijing* 3/2/6, 3/3/8.

³⁴ *Zuozhuan Chenggong* 2/797.

³⁵ Chan, 1964, p. 123.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.128. Cf. *Yinwenzi* Da Dao II/14/15; *Hanfeizi* 13/66/14, 23/139/5.

³⁷ According to Tang Junyi, the emphasis of the original meaning of *li* is more on human activities rather than objective external things (Tang, 2005, p.7). The proposed reading agrees with Tang Junyi's reading to the extent that human activities are important but disagrees that the emphasis is more on human activities.

³⁸ E.g. *Xunzi* 18/107, 23/3.

³⁹ It should be noted that the term "li" does not always denote something positive in the *Xunzi*. In the "Fei Shierzi" chapter, for example, Xunzi harshly criticises those who promote partial knowledge as using statements having *li* to deceive and mislead ignorant people (*Xunzi* 6/8). Furthermore, Xunzi warns against the limitless pursuit of knowing the *li* of everything (*Xunzi* 21/78-82). Nonetheless, *li* is mostly used in a positive sense that is associated with giving rise to order.

⁴⁰ Eric Hutton (2002) aptly highlights the connection between *li* and *Dao* in Xunzi's thought and argues convincingly that *li* should be understood as "pattern" instead of "reason" or "rationale" as Antonio Cua has suggested. I agree with the textual observations Hutton has made about *li* in the *Xunzi*. But what I seek to illustrate using the connection between *Dao* and *li* is different from that of Hutton. While Hutton's focus is on using the connection between *Dao* and *li* to better understand Xunzi's conception of moral reasoning, my focus here is on understanding ethical transformation.

⁴¹ Even though the terms *Dao* and *li* are sometimes associated in the text, it is unclear whether Xunzi intended to use *Dao-li* as a concept. The fact that "Dao" and "li" has appeared together seems to be the basis for scholars like Wing-tsit Chan to understand *Dao-li* as a concept in Xunzi and to say that the term *Dao-li* was already found in Zhuangzi and Xunzi before Hanfeizi (1964, p.126-7). Zhang li-wen, in his studies of the concept *li*, argues that *Dao* and *li* are the same thing for Xunzi, both referring to the principles of things (1991, p.32). Unfortunately, both Chan and Zhang have not offered elaborate explanation as to why *li* has already acquired the connotation of a moral principle other than citing passages in which the terms *Dao* and *li* appear in the same passage (e.g. *Xunzi* 1/41, 22/41). There is also insufficient textual evidence that warrants us to make an abstraction and understand *li* as the law of nature or some ultimate principle.

⁴² Nivison, 1996, p.275.

⁴³ See Graham, 1967, Appendix.

⁴⁴ See Dubs, 1966, p.281; Watson 2003, p.144; Knoblock 22.1b.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Hutton, 2014; Puett, 2004; Stalnaker argues that Xunzi's use of *qing* is ambiguous between "emotions" and "dispositions" with the latter usages being more common (2006, p.61).

⁴⁶ Hutton, 2001, p.279.

⁴⁷ According to the *Xunzi*, "yu is the response of *qing*" (22/63).

⁴⁸ Hutton's translation suggested this line of reading (4.243).

⁴⁹ This passage touches upon many difficult terms. Given the scope of this project, it is not feasible to examine each of the terms in length. Instead, I will only extract some points that shed light on our understanding of *Dao*.

⁵⁰ Stalnaker, 2006, p.174.

⁵¹ *Ibid*:177. Cf. *Xunzi* 19/63-64.

⁵² See "Remaining Ambiguity" for discussion of how our reading could be determined by whether Xunzi thinks that there is only one way to pattern *qing*.

⁵³ See Wei, 1992, Ch.3.

⁵⁴ See Hansen, 1992, p.310.

⁵⁵ See Wong 2000 for suggestion along this line.

⁵⁶ See Hutton 2000 for suggestion along this line.

⁵⁷ I have argued (reference deleted for peer review) that feelings for one's own kin can still be self-regarding feelings.

⁵⁸ See Chong, 2007, p.73.

⁵⁹ I thank Kwong-loi Shun for helping me think through this point.

⁶⁰ Nivison, 1996, p.210.

⁶¹ I am grateful for an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to address this point. For a well-developed position that argues how a life that follows *Dao* is a life that is in fact good and satisfying for oneself, see Tang, 2016, especially Ch. 4.

⁶² In another passage, it is said that the superior person can get constant security and honour (4/47).

⁶³ The belief that a person can find greater satisfaction by doing the right thing is not alien to the trend of thought in Xunzi's intellectual context, at least not when we put aside different thinkers' conceptions of what constitutes right actions. According to the author of *Lushi chunqiu*, for example, succeeding in *li* is the basis for obtaining the four desires (*Lushi chunqiu* 5/4.2). In *Mencius* 1A:2, it is said that a person who is not worthy (*xian* 賢) will not be able to find pleasure even when he has luxuries such as grand towers, ponds, and birds.

⁶⁴ See Nivison, 1996, Ch. 8 for a discussion of philosophical voluntarism. Although the chapter does not focus on Xunzi's thought, it is a helpful article that gives us a sense of the intellectual background against which Xunzi is operating.

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