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BU REN 不忍 (CANNOT BEAR TO HARM) IN THE MENCIOUS

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1. Introduction

The term *bu ren* 不忍, which may be loosely translated as “cannot bear to harm others,” does not occur frequently in the *Mencius*. However, the passages where the term does occur are ones that are crucial to our understanding of Mencius’ thought. In one of the key passages, 1A:7, Mencius uses the example of King Xuan of Qi 齊宣王 having the heart/mind of *bu ren* for an ox to show that he has the kind of heart/mind that enables him to be a true king. The context of the story is this: King Xuan asks Mencius whether he is capable of protecting his people and being a true king. Mencius reminds the king of an incident where the king spared an ox that is about to be killed for consecrating a bell because the king *bu ren* to see the ox shrinking with fear:

Mencius said, “I heard the following from Hu He:

The King was sitting in the hall. He saw someone passing below, leading an ox. The King noticed this and said, ‘Where is the ox going?’ ‘The blood of the ox is to be used for consecrating a new bell.’ ‘Spare it. I [*bu ren*] to see it shrinking with fear, like an innocent man going to the place of execution.’”

.....

Mencius said, “This heart is sufficient to enable you to become a true King.” (1A:7)

Mencius tells the king that his heart/mind that *bu ren* to see the ox shrinking is sufficient to enable him to become a true king. He then urges the king to take his heart/mind that *bu ren* to see the ox shrinking and apply it to his people.¹

In another key passage, 2A:6, Mencius links the heart/mind of *bu ren* to the heart/mind of *ce yin* 惻隱 (compassion/commiseration), which he then identifies as the sprout of humaneness (*ren*^b 仁).²

Mencius said, “Everyone has the heart/mind of *bu ren ren*^c 不忍人 (human beings). The early kings had the heart/mind of *bu ren ren*^c, so they instituted governments that are *bu ren ren*^c. . . . The reason for saying that everyone has the heart/mind of *bu ren ren*^c is this. Suppose one suddenly sees an infant who is about to fall into a well; anyone in such a situation will have the heart of

being alarmed and *ce yin*. . . . The heart/mind of *ce yin* is the sprout of humaneness (*ren*^b 仁)." (2A:6)

Again, in 7B:31, Mencius suggests a connection between *bu ren* and humaneness:

Mencius said, "Everyone has what they *bu ren*. [From what one *bu ren*] reaching all the way to what they can bear is humaneness. If one can extend to the full his heart/mind that does not want to harm others, then humaneness will be more than one can use." (7B:31)

A cursory glance at the passages above suggests that *bu ren* has some important role to play in Mencius' ethical picture. However, studies of *bu ren* are scant in the existing literature. Although scholars do not deny the importance of *bu ren*, *bu ren* is often mentioned in passing without in-depth analysis. Such under-examination of *bu ren* probably has to do with a tendency to assume that *bu ren* is equivalent to *ce yin*, and subsequently to subsume discussion of *bu ren* under a discussion of *ce yin*. This trend can be traced all the way back to Zhu Xi, who takes *bu ren* to be *ce yin*.³ Textual evidence does suggest that both *bu ren* and *ce yin* are related to the development of *ren* (2A:6 and 7B:31). Yet without a clear account of *bu ren*, it is difficult to determine if Mencius thinks that *bu ren* is *ce yin*. A detailed analysis of *bu ren* is thus called for. It can help us better understand *ce yin* and also further our understanding of Mencius' thought in general, revealing certain assumptions and the conceptual framework that he adopts.

This article focuses on *bu ren* in the *Mencius* and proposes an interpretation of *bu ren* that is consistent with textual evidence. However, the interpretation cannot claim to have decisive textual evidence given the limited textual resources. I do not attempt to give an exhaustive analysis of *bu ren*; instead, I will focus primarily on the psychological state that underlies *bu ren*. In section 2, I make textual observations about discussions of *bu ren* in the *Mencius*. In section 3, I offer my interpretation of *bu ren*, highlighting the special relation-regarding feature of *bu ren*. In section 4, I further analyze the psychological conditions necessary for *bu ren* and suggest that *bu ren* not only requires one to be concerned about whether others are harmed; it also requires an unmediated, involved standpoint that identifies the victim as a particular. In section 5, I defend my interpretation by explaining how it can make better sense of the dialogue with King Xuan in 1A:7 and other strands of Mencius' ethical thought. In section 6, I discuss the implications that the present study has on contemporary discussions of sympathy-related topics and on studies of Mencian thought.

II. Bu Ren in the Mencius

A. Unable to Bear Harming Others

Bu literally means "no" and is often used as a negation. *Ren* can be translated as "bear" or "endure." When *bu* is used together with *ren*, it means "cannot

bear” or “unable to bear.” The heart/mind mentioned in 1A:7, by virtue of which Mencius thinks King Xuan can be a true king, should refer to the heart/mind (*xin*) of *bu ren ren*^c 不忍人之心 that is mentioned in 2A:6.

Existing translations and commentaries suggest two readings of “the heart/mind of *bu ren ren*^c”:

1. “the heart/mind that is unable to bear the suffering of others,” and
2. “the heart/mind that is unable to bear harming others.”⁴

Textual evidence does not support (1), if we take the object of *bu ren* to be the painful feeling of others. Reading (2) is more consistent with the usages of *bu ren* in the early texts. As Kwong-loi Shun observes, the term *bu ren* in the early texts takes as its object a situation, an action, or one’s own mental states.⁵ There is no indication that the object of one’s *bu ren* is another’s painful feeling. Moreover, a survey of the usages of *bu ren* in early texts shows that *bu ren* is often used when there is an act that can be taken toward someone or something. There are numerous constructions of “*bu ren* (verb),” where the verb following *bu ren* is an act that involves harming someone or something.⁶ Reading *bu ren ren*^c as “unable to harm others” can also make better sense of 7B:31. In this passage, it is said that extending what one *bu ren* will lead to humaneness; if one extends the heart/mind that does not want to harm others, one will have over-abundance of *ren*. Although it is not clear if *bu ren ren*^c is just the heart/mind that does not want to harm others, reading *bu ren ren*^c as “unable to bear harming others” seems reasonable in this context, for it preserves the parallel between the sentences “unable to bear harming others” and “does not want to harm others.”

One consideration against reading *bu ren* as “unable to bear harming others,” as pointed out by Shun, is that the example of one’s seeing an infant who is about to fall into a well (2A:6) does not involve the witness harming the infant.⁷ This suggests that it is not necessary for one actually to be in a position to harm others in order for her to experience *bu ren*. We may adopt a milder reading of “unable to bear harming others,” which avoids this worry. On the mild reading, one who is in the state of *bu ren* sees the way she acts as having a bearing on whether others are harmed.⁸ This could be an act that directly harms someone (e.g., killing someone) or an act that refrains from intervening or rectifying a situation that results in bringing harm to someone (e.g., not saving an infant).

I use the word “see” in order to remain neutral on whether *bu ren ren*^c is cognitive or conative. The way Mencius speaks of *bu ren ren*^c in 2A:6 seems to suggest that *bu ren* is a dispositional state rather than an occurrent state.⁹ As for cases where *bu ren ren*^c is activated, there is insufficient textual evidence for us to tell whether *bu ren ren*^c is an emotion or a judgment, and whether *bu ren ren*^c is a reactive feeling/judgment with regard to the plight of others or one’s active concern for whether others are harmed. Seeing one’s own agency as having a bearing on whether others are harmed does

not necessarily mean that one believes or judges that she is in a position to harm (depending on how strong we take the epistemic state of belief or judgment to be). In some circumstances, seeing that one's own agency has a bearing on others could be more conative than cognitive. For instance, some people who experience survivor's guilt might not believe (at least not consciously) that they are responsible for others' being harmed, but they might still irrationally see themselves as having to do with others' being harmed. In other circumstances, one's seeing of one's bearing on others could be more cognitive. For instance, King Xuan might rightly believe that he can decide whether the ox is to be killed. All I suggest is that *bu ren ren*^c requires one to see her own agency as having a bearing on whether others are harmed. I leave open the question as to how conative or how cognitive *bu ren ren*^c is.

Suppose one is the only person around the well but does not save the child. She sees that her not acting is what brings about the infant's falling into the well, even though she is not the one who pushes the child into the well. She sees that if she had acted differently, say, by calling for help or pulling the child back, the child would not have fallen into the well. If she does not help, the child will fall into the well. We do not need to delve into the metaphysics of action to decide whether there is a difference between doing harm and allowing harm here. What matters is that there is a clear sense, to her, in which how she acts has a bearing on whether the child is harmed. It does not matter whether she is actually in a position to harm others, nor whether there is any harm done or potential harm that can be inflicted.¹⁰ It is also a separate question whether she in fact has any responsibility for the child.¹¹ The relevant point here is that one who is in *bu ren* sees her agency as having a bearing on whether others are harmed. This mild reading does justice to the way *bu ren* is used in the early texts without implying that one is actually in a position to harm others.

In light of the textual considerations above, I read *bu ren ren*^c as the inability to bear harming others. I take "harm" to mean that one's well-being is negatively affected. I use "harm" because it is a broader notion that can include suffering. If one holds the view that there is no distinction between harm and suffering, then it does not make a difference in my reading. If one holds the view that suffering further requires one to be aware that she is harmed, my reading of *bu ren* can include cases where others are suffering. One can be in a state of *bu ren* for victims who are aware that they are harmed, and one can also be in a state of *bu ren* for victims who are not aware that they are harmed.

Hereafter, I will also refer to the heart/mind of *bu ren ren*^c as *bu ren*. My discussion of *bu ren* is only concerned with the kind of mental state that one has when one is confronted with a situation that involves others being harmed. It does not cover cases where one is unable to bear doing something for other reasons (e.g., 5B:1). The expression *bu ren* also avoids the suggestion that the kind of mental state that is sensitive to harm to others

is confined to human beings. As King Xuan's *bu ren* for the ox shows, *bu ren* can also be directed to the well-being of animals.

B. My Agency on Your Plight

In the following, I will draw out the implications of reading *bu ren* as the inability to harm others. Recall the two different readings:

1. "the heart/mind that is unable to bear the suffering of others," and
2. "the heart/mind that is unable to bear harming others."⁴

In some interpretations, (1) and (2) are compatible with each other. However, (1) and (2) cannot be used interchangeably. Reading (2) implies one's seeing one's own agential involvement in a way that (1) does not. In (1), one does not necessarily see that her agency is any way involved in harming others. In (2), one necessarily sees that her agency is involved in harming others. As argued in the previous section, since (2) is the more plausible reading of *bu ren ren*^c, then one who is in *bu ren* must see her agency as having a bearing on whether others are harmed.

Let me use three examples to explain what I mean by saying that one sees one's own agency as having a bearing on whether others are harmed.

Scenario A. Lisa is watching the news about refugees on TV and finds it difficult to bear the suffering of the refugees. However, she does not see herself as either the one who inflicts harm on these refugees or someone who is in a position where she could have prevented the suffering of the refugees.

Scenario B. Lisa is a participant in the Milgram experiment and is told to deliver a strong shock to the recipient in the next room. She understands that as a participant she is supposed to follow her authority's instruction, but when she is instructed to deliver a very high-level electric shock to the recipient, she is unable to bear doing this.

Scenario C. Lisa sees that her good friend is being bullied and physically attacked by someone. She feels that she is unable to bear standing there and seeing her friend get hurt.

In all three scenarios, Lisa is sensitive to whether others are harmed.

Colloquially, we can use the English expression "unable to bear" to characterize Lisa's reactions in all three scenarios. But only her reactions in Scenarios B and C count as *bu ren*. The main difference between Scenario A, as it is described here, on the one hand and Scenarios B and C on the other is that in Scenario A Lisa does not see the way she acts as having any bearing on the refugees' suffering. She could donate and maintain the view that she herself has no bearing on whether the refugees are harmed. Supposing that Lisa in Scenario A says that she has *bu ren* for the refugees, it would make sense to follow up with the question, "What is it that you *bu ren* to do to the refugees?" Suppose Lisa says she genuinely does not see that her action could in any way make a difference whether the refugees are

harmed. Then, for whatever painful feeling or concern she is having, it is not *bu ren*. She has simply misdescribed her mental state. This does not mean that Lisa in Scenario A is not genuinely pained by others' suffering. It is just that her painful reaction will be some other psychological state that responds to others' suffering, which can also motivate her to alleviate the refugees' suffering, say, by donating to the relevant NGOs that support the refugees.¹² That she is motivated to alleviate others' suffering is not indicative of whether the mental state she is in is *bu ren*.

Although there is a structural difference between Scenarios B and C, namely whether Lisa is in fact in a position to directly cause harm to the victim, such a difference does not affect the point that what Lisa undergoes is *bu ren*. In both Scenarios B and C, Lisa sees herself as having a bearing on whether others are harmed. If she delivers the shock in Scenario B, she sees that it is she who harms the participant; if she stands still and does not intervene in Scenario C, she sees that her standing still is what brings about a situation in which her friend continues to be harmed. Lisa in Scenarios B and C might not end up acting differently for fear of the consequences of disobeying orders or the bullies, but this does not affect her seeing her agency as having a bearing on whether the victim is harmed. That one sees oneself as having a bearing on whether others are harmed does not entail that one knows what specific act one could take to alleviate harm, nor that one will necessarily act to alleviate harm. There could be other overriding factors that eventually prevent one who undergoes *bu ren* from acting. Hence, whether one actually acts to alleviate harm or how one acts to alleviate harm is not indicative of whether what one undergoes is *bu ren*. And as Scenario A shows, even if one is moved to alleviate harm there could also be other mental states that are doing the motivating.

I am not suggesting that Lisa's painful reaction in Scenario A is in any way inferior to Scenarios B and C. The examples are only meant to illustrate, not establish, the conceptual difference between one who sees her agency as having a bearing on whether others are harmed and one who does not. It is stipulated in my descriptions of the scenarios that Lisa in Scenario A does not see herself as being in a position to prevent the refugees from being harmed but sees herself as being in a position to inflict harm in Scenarios B and C. I agree that it is possible to re-describe Scenario A in such a way that Lisa sees that she could do something that makes a difference whether the refugees are harmed and she has *bu ren*. Since Mencius thinks that a *ren*^b person's love embraces all, he probably also thinks that a *ren*^b person will see herself as being related to all (7B:46). Hence, ideally, a viewer would have *bu ren* when they watch some strangers' suffering on the news. It is also possible to re-describe Scenario B in a way in which Lisa does not see herself as having a bearing on whether others are harmed and hence does not have *bu ren*. What matters here is that my descriptions of these scenarios illustrate the conceptual difference between a psychological state in which

one sees one's agency as having a bearing on others' being harmed and a psychological state that does not.

III. An Interpretation of Bu Ren

In the following, I take what Mencius said about *bu ren* (section 2) and propose an interpretation of *bu ren* (sections 3 and 4) that is consistent with and has the advantage of explaining available textual evidence (section 5). My goal is only to identify certain special features of *bu ren* that have the potential of deepening our understanding of psychological phenomena that are related to our sensitivity to the plight of others, and our understanding of Mencius' thought (section 6).

I take *bu ren* to be a mental state in which one sees the way one acts as being part of the circumstances of harm to others. A special feature of *bu ren* is that it is neither self-regarding nor other-regarding, but relation-regarding. By "self-regarding" I mean that the state is directed toward one's own well-being; by "other-regarding" I mean that the state is directed toward other's well-being. *Bu ren* has both self-regarding and other-regarding elements but is not reducible to either. The self-regarding element is that it matters to one whether her action will bring about circumstances in which others are harmed. The other-regarding element of *bu ren* is that it matters to one whether others are relieved from harm.¹³ But this does not mean that *bu ren* is self-regarding. We can imagine that in some cases the reluctance to harm others entirely makes reference to one's own feeling rather than to the victim's circumstances. For example, the mind of a timid officer is not focused on whether an ox will actually be harmed, but on whether he dares to use a knife to stab the ox. The circumstances need only be slightly intimidating for him such that he is too scared to do it. Or consider someone who sets high standards for herself such that she cannot allow her own agency to have anything to do with whether others are harmed. Her focus is on, as it were, keeping her own hands clean, not on whether others are harmed. By contrast, the reluctance of someone who has *bu ren* makes reference to the circumstances of others. It is due to the circumstances that the victim is in—for example, that the infant is about to fall into the well and that his agency is related to whether the infant ends up falling into the well—that he is motivated to act in a certain way to prevent the infant from falling into the well.

Imagine a case where I am rushing to an important meeting and I see an injured person on the street. I know that I am the only person around who can help her. I think, "She is injured and requires immediate attention. If I just walk away, her condition will for sure worsen." The way things seem to me is that whether I walk away does make a difference to how bad this injured person's condition gets. I *bu ren* to walk away and therefore decide to help. Just when I am about to help, I see the paramedic team coming to help her. The paramedic team assures me that they do not need my help, so

I walk away. On my way to the meeting, I am still very distressed and concerned about the injured person. After the meeting, I try to search in the news for updates on the situation. In this case, I am pained when I see the injured person, and I am still pained after I have left the scene. But in the proposed interpretation, my state of *bu ren* ceases the moment when the paramedic team arrives and I think that my walking away makes no difference whether the injured person is harmed. Before the paramedic team arrives, my walking away has the consequence that the injured person will incur more harm. Although I am still distressed after I have walked away, it is some other psychological state that is sensitive to another's plight, not *bu ren*. This case thus illustrates that *bu ren* is neither about alleviating one's own unpleasant feelings (as when I still feel upset after I have left the scene) nor about asserting one's own moral agency in a way that shows one does not have regard for the circumstances that others are in (as when I leave when the paramedic team has arrived).

A more accurate way of characterizing *bu ren* is "relation-regarding." By "relation-regarding" I mean that the state is directed to the relation one stands in with regard to others. The "relation" part is not limited to a special personal relationship such as a familial relationship or friendship. It does not give rise to the question whether the relation ultimately makes reference to oneself, as in my family or my friend. The relation to which *bu ren* directs is about how one stands in relation to others such that how one acts has a bearing on whether others are harmed. The relation can be very thin—for example, the way I am sitting in a certain relation to you in the theater has a bearing on whether you can see the stage.¹⁴ Since one who experiences *bu ren* sees her agency as having a bearing on whether others are harmed, that awareness of the bearing that her agency has on others entails that she see herself as standing in a certain relation to others. Without regard to the relation in which she stands with the victim, by virtue of which her agency affects the victim's circumstances, she will not have *bu ren*. In order to give regard to the relation, it is inevitable that one will have to consider the victim's circumstances as well as how one's own agency will make a difference in the victim's circumstances.

IV. Psychological Conditions for Bu Ren

In this section, I will build on the preceding interpretation and flesh out four psychological conditions that are necessary for *bu ren*: (A) unmediated perspective, (B) involved stance, (C) identifying the victim as a particular, and (D) concern about whether others are harmed.

A. Unmediated Perspective

One who experiences *bu ren* necessarily takes on an unmediated perspective, by which I mean the perspective from which things appear to me that

is not mediated by another perspective. If I have *bu ren*, then it appears to me that there is a situation that is unbearable. I do not get into a *bu ren* state by taking on either some third-person perspective or the victim's perspective. We can illustrate the difference among these perspectives with an example. If I were confronted with drowning children, I could, from a third-person perspective, come to see that even though I do not know them, it matters from the "point of view of the universe" whether they are harmed.¹⁵ I might also take on the children's perspective and imagine what it is like for them to suffer, and come to see that it matters whether they are harmed. The perspective in *bu ren*, however, is not mediated by another perspective. It simply matters to me whether the children are harmed.

The unmediated perspective can be in line with the first-person perspective, but they are different. The first-person perspective can be a perspective that is arrived at through simulating or imagining another person's perspective, but the unmediated perspective is not arrived at through another perspective. The unmediated perspective is also not a perspective that contrasts with the second- or third-person perspective. It does not put emphasis either on any special significance attached to the first-person point of view or on one that favors those who are near and dear to us. It does not presuppose that I see the victims and me as having a special relationship, as in my child or my friend, in order for me to be sensitive to the plight of others. The unmediated perspective is also not necessarily self-conscious. I do not have to react with the self-conscious thought, "I feel awful that they are drowning!" I can just react consciously and immediately with, "These children are about to be drowned!"¹⁶

B. Involved Stance

When one is in the state of *bu ren*, she assumes an involved stance, where she recognizes that her agency has a bearing on the victim's circumstances. This is conceptually different from an uninvolved stance, where she recognizes that the victim is about to be harmed but does not see herself as having any bearing on the victim's circumstances. In the uninvolved stance, she has to decide whether she is in a position to respond to the plight of others. If she decides that she is in a position to respond, she then considers whether or not she should respond. If one who is in an uninvolved stance fails to respond, it is possible that she simply sees herself as ignoring a call for help, which could be answered by her. By contrast, someone who is in an involved stance sees herself as being in a position to respond to another's plight, so she does not have to decide whether she is in a position to respond. She only needs to decide whether or not to respond. If she fails to respond, she would see herself as ignoring a call for her help and as withdrawing herself from the circumstances. An uninvolved stance could shift to an involved stance when someone comes to see that her agency has a bearing on the victim's circumstances.

The difference between these two stances is analogous to the difference between responding to a “call for papers” and an “invitation to present a paper” at a conference. If someone sees a call for papers, she does not see the call as directed at her even though she could respond to the call. By contrast, if she receives an invitation to contribute a paper, she sees the call as directed at her. Taking up either of these two different stances the agent could adopt the same evaluative standard or decision procedure to reach the same conclusion about whether or not she should respond to the call. The difference is that in the “call for papers” case, if she does not want to contribute, she can simply ignore the call for papers. In the “invited paper” case, if she does not want to contribute, she has to decline the invitation.

This explains why those who have *bu ren* are easily moved to action.¹⁷ Since someone who is in an uninvolved stance does not see her default position as one that is involved in the circumstances of harm (though this does not prevent her from very quickly getting herself into position to help), she has to take an extra mental step to opt in to help. Since someone who is in an involved stance already sees that her agency is involved in the circumstances of harm, she does not need to take the extra mental step of opting in to help. If there are no other overriding reasons that block her involvement, she proceeds to help.

The distinction between the involved and uninvolved stances should not be confused with the distinction between detached and attached stances, if we take a “detached” stance to mean something like a reflective-spectator stance, and an “attached” stance to mean something like an immediate, unreflective response. The involved subject can still remain reflective under the circumstances and employ whatever evaluation standard or decision procedure that she deems fit. The distinction between the two stances also does not itself lie in whose perspective it is. An uninvolved stance is compatible with an unmediated perspective. An uninvolved subject can find the victim’s circumstances unbearable from her own unmediated perspective but does not see herself as being in a position to harm or prevent harm to the victim. An involved stance is also compatible with a mediated perspective. One might, through taking on the perspective of the victim or of the universe, come to see one’s own agency as having a bearing on the victim’s circumstances. What *bu ren* requires is an unmediated, involved stance.

C. Identifying the Victim as a Particular

One who has *bu ren* is in her mind able to locate and point to some particular person or people. She has to see that her agency is tied to this particular victim, and not to someone who happens to bear certain units of harm in this world or to some abstract concept or to some statistical numbers. Once she can identify the victim as a particular person in her mind, she is more likely to

see herself as standing in a relation to the victim. In the other way around, once she comes to see that she stands in certain relation to the victim, it is psychologically easier for her to identify the victim as a particular person.

It is probably more likely in practice that one has *bu ren* for those she is directly acquainted with, rather than for those who are more distant and out of sight. When one is physically and directly confronted with a situation that involves harm to the victim, it is more vivid to her how her actions can make a difference in the situation. But this does not mean that it is impossible for us to have *bu ren* for those who are more distant.¹⁸ When I donate to charity, for example, I can think of what I know about these children so that they are not merely some numbers or abstract concepts to me, but particular people that need help. I have faces of these children in mind, as it were, such that my donation is directed at them.

D. Concern about Whether Others Are Harmed

The most obvious condition for *bu ren* is (D), namely that one has to be concerned about whether others are harmed. Conditions (A), (B), and (C) can also be present in psychological states that underlie some negative attitudes or feelings, such as being vengeful. But if one is not concerned about whether others are harmed, she can manipulate her relation to others to serve her own agenda. This explains why one who is in *bu ren* also must not want to harm others (7B:31).

V. King Xuan and the Ox

This section draws on the proposed interpretation of *bu ren* in order to understand the dialogue between Mencius and King Xuan. For Mencius, the fact that the king has *bu ren* for the ox suggests that the king is already in psychological conditions (A) to (D). If we assume that the king does not want his people to be harmed and that his dialogue with Mencius somehow moves him to extend kindness to his people, then somewhere along in the dialogue Mencius must have managed to move the king's mind to conditions (A) to (D) and remind him that his agency has bearing on whether his people are harmed.

Before this dialogue with Mencius, the king might well have been aware that he has power over his people, but it might not be at the forefront of his mind that his agency has bearing on whether his people are harmed. It takes a reminder to prompt a psychological shift so that the king comes to notice that this particular group of people, his people, who stand in relation to him, are calling for his help. Metaphorically speaking, this shift in the mind's eye of the king is one from having a blurry image of a mass of people that can be abstracted as "the people" to seeing people as particular individuals, as "his people," whose well-being depends on the king's actions. When I say that the king turns his attention to "his people," I do not mean it in the

sense that the king must see the people as standing in special relationship to him. It is another question how special the king construes the relation to be. As mentioned before, the relation that *bu ren* requires is a thin one. The king only needs to see that he stands in relation to the people such that his agency is involved in the circumstances of harm to the people. To use an everyday example to illustrate this: suppose someone in the audience of a play is so absorbed in watching a performance that she stands up and blocks the view of people behind her. She of course knows that there are people behind her, but her attention could be directed elsewhere so that it is no longer prominent in her mind that she is blocking the view of people behind her. Her friend gives her a nudge, reminding her that “I am blocking the view of these people who are sitting behind me. I need to sit down.” What Mencius is doing is like the friend giving a nudge, directing the king’s attention to how his agency could harm his people.

My reading can make sense of why the king, despite his feeling *bu ren* for the ox, does not seem to have *bu ren* for the lamb. When the ox is shrinking in front of the king, the king’s attention is on this particular ox. It becomes obvious to the king that his agency can make a difference whether the ox is harmed. Without seeing the lamb, the king probably does not identify the lamb as a particular. To the king, the lamb is just some lamb that is about to be sacrificed for ceremonial purposes. He does not see this particular lamb as standing in relation to him in such a way that his agency makes a difference whether the lamb is harmed.

My reading can also explain the part of the dialogue that says if the superior person sees a live animal, he *bu ren* to see its death; if the superior person hears the sound of an animal, he *bu ren* to eat its meat (1A:7). When the superior person confronts a particular animal, it becomes more obvious to him that he stands in relation to this animal such that the way he acts has a bearing on whether the animal is harmed. If the superior person stays away from the kitchen, the animals do not become a particular to him, and it will be more difficult for him to focus his mind on how he stands in relation to the animal and come to see that how he acts has a bearing on whether the animal is harmed.

My reading also explains why *bu ren* is linked to benevolent government (仁政) (1A:7, 2A:6, 4A:1).¹⁹ It is crucial for rulers to have *bu ren* because the rulers, more than anyone else, are in a position to act in a way that harms or prevents harm to the people. But in order to have a government that is *bu ren ren*^c, the ruler first has to see that his people’s circumstances are contingent on his agency. Just as how the king has a bearing on whether the ox is harmed, the king also has a bearing on whether his people are harmed. Hence, it is said in 4B:29 that Yu 禹 thinks that if anyone in his kingdom drowned, it is as if he himself drowned him; Ji 稷 thinks that if anyone in his kingdom starved, it is as if he himself starved him.²⁰ These kings see themselves as having a bearing on whether their people are harmed and

that, if they are harmed, it is partly due to their actions, which bring about circumstances that involve harming them.

The proposed reading of King Xuan's case is different from many existing explanations of how Mencius prompts a change in King Xuan's attitude. One suggested explanation is that what Mencius is doing is putting rational pressure on the king. Once the king recognizes his own inconsistency, he comes to realize that he has a reason to have sympathy for his people.²¹ A second explanation is that Mencius is trying to cite the ox incident as evidence to prove to the king that he mistakenly believes that he does not have the ability to have sympathy for his people.²² A third explanation is that the king had some inchoate feelings of sympathy. Mencius helps the king recognize that the suffering of others is a reason for him to have sympathy. Once this reason is made clear, the king will channel his inchoate feelings of sympathy into action and override other competing desires.²³ A fourth explanation is that Mencius is trying to get the king to recognize that he has a heart/mind of sympathy and urge him to exercise that heart/mind toward his own people.²⁴ A fifth explanation is that Mencius is trying to help the king form a belief about the suffering and pain of the people and, in doing so, heighten his sympathetic feelings.²⁵

The existing interpretations disagree among themselves what Mencius is trying to get the king to recognize. There are also points made in each of the preceding interpretations that are compatible with my explanation. A crucial difference that sets my explanation apart from the existing interpretations is that the latter group assumes that Mencius is trying to update some belief of the king. Some argue that the belief to be updated has to do with certain things about the king himself, and some argue that the belief to be updated is about the situation of his people. In my explanation, the change in the king's attitude is not prompted by an update of belief about the relationship he has with the people or the suffering of the people. Rather, the change in the king's attitude is prompted by a shift of attention from whatever is preoccupying his mind to the fact that he stands in a relation to his people, by virtue of which his agency has a bearing on whether his people are being harmed. Mencius is not telling the king anything that he does not already know. Rather, like the friend who gives a nudge, Mencius is simply reminding the king that he is involved in circumstances of harm to his people and that his agency could harm them.

It is worth pointing out that King Xuan's *bu ren* for the ox is a case where the king first identifies the ox as a particular and then comes to see that his agency has a bearing on whether the ox is harmed. What Mencius then tries to do is to get the king to see his people as particulars and that his agency has a bearing on their well-being. One may point out a potential disanalogy between the ox case and the people case. The ox case suggests that the king can move from seeing an ox to identifying the ox as a particular and recognizing that his agency is related to whether the ox is harmed. It

does not mean that the king can identify his people as a particular without seeing the people and thereby see his agency as having a bearing on whether his people are harmed. One may then question the effectiveness of Mencius' strategy by arguing that these two cases are disanalogous. This worry makes it unclear at this point whether the king can make a psychological shift upon Mencius' reminder that his agency has a bearing on whether his people are harmed and how one can come to identify a victim as particular without confronting the actual situation. It is interesting to note that Mencius seems to have assumed that the king can identify his people as particulars without actually seeing them in person.

VI. Implications

In recent years, especially in English-language studies, there has been a growing discussion of Mencius' view on sympathy. However, there is no clear one-to-one match between a Chinese term in the Mencius and the English term "sympathy." In recent discussions, there is a tendency to take the notion of *ce yin* 惻隱, which can be translated as "commiseration" or "compassion," to be sympathy.²⁶ Stephen Darwall, for example, begins his article "Empathy, Sympathy, Care" with the following commentary on Mencius 2A:6:

What Mencius' translator calls compassion is an instance of what I shall call sympathetic concern or sympathy. It is a feeling or emotion that (a) responds to some apparent threat or obstacle to an individual's good or well-being, (b) has that individual himself as object, and (c) involves concern for him, and thus for his well-being, for his sake. Seeing the child on the verge of falling, one is concerned for his safety, not just for its (his safety's) sake, but for his sake. One is concerned for him. Sympathy for the child is a way of caring for (and about) him.²⁷

More recently, Nancy Snow also begins her encyclopedia entry on "Sympathy" with the following remarks:

The Confucian philosopher Mengzi (also known as Mencius), for example, writes that a person seeing a small child on the verge of falling into a well would be moved by alarm and compassion. . . . Here "compassion" seems to be used interchangeably with "sympathy." When I feel sympathy or compassion, I show care and concern for another in her plight.²⁸

Both Darwall and Snow have not offered any reason for thinking that the mental state that Mencius is referring to in 2A:6 is sympathy. It is also unclear if they think *bu ren* is the same as *ce yin* or that *bu ren* is also sympathy. Readers who are not familiar with the text will not be sensitive to the fact that there are two notions at work in the story, *bu ren* and *ce yin*.²⁹

Myeong-Seok Kim and Shirong Luo are two of the few who have done recent text-based studies of Mencius' view on sympathy.³⁰ However,

both Kim and Luo conduct their analyses primarily in terms of *ce yin*. An approach that focuses on *ce yin* could make us overlook the nuances of *bu ren*, which is important to our understanding of *ce yin* as well as Mencius' view on the sensitivity of human beings to the plight of others.

A proper understanding of Mencius' conception of sympathy, if there is any, requires a more detailed analysis of *ce yin* and *bu ren*. Admittedly, questions such as how *bu ren* relates to *ce yin*, and whether (and, if so, how) *bu ren* captures Mencius' conception of sympathy (or empathy, or compassion) deserve much more attention than what I am able to give here. A more elaborate investigation into these questions will exceed the scope of an article of this nature. Here, I can only point toward two areas of research to which the present study can contribute.

One area concerns studies that seek to understand the kind of mental states that are sensitive to the plight of others. There might very well be fine-grained distinctions among these different states, which we may call sympathy, empathy, and compassion. But as long as we agree that these different states all share the feature of one being affected in some negative ways by someone else's plight, we may group these kinds of states under the label "sympathy."³¹

The proposed interpretation of *bu ren* highlights an aspect of Mencius' conception of sympathy that is quite different from many contemporary accounts. According to Darwall:

Sympathy for a person and her plight is felt as from the third-person perspective of one-caring, whereas empathy involves something like a sharing of the other's mental states, frequently, as from her standpoint.³²

Unlike Darwall's account of sympathy, *bu ren* is attained from neither the third-person perspective nor the perspective of the victim, but rather from an unmediated perspective. Moreover, I take Darwall's account to imply that when one has sympathy it is still possible that she sees herself as an observer and takes an uninvolved stance. There is an extra mental step to be taken in order for her to become involved in the victim's circumstances. In the proposed account, one who is in *bu ren* assumes an involved stance. If one has *bu ren*, one does not need to take another mental step to get herself in a position to help. Quite the contrary, it is when one decides not to help that one has to take the extra mental step to opt out of helping others. Darwall might respond by saying that *bu ren*, then, is not the kind of sympathy that he is discussing. Fair enough. Then the present study can at least help us sort out in what way Mencius' view on sympathy is relevantly different to and sheds new light on the contemporary understanding of sympathy.

The proposed interpretation is also different from interpretations that take Mencius' conception of sympathy to be merely other-regarding. Justin Tiwald, for example, suggests that the Confucian conception of sympathy

“automatically assumes another’s point of view” and is “purely other-regarding.”³³ In the proposed interpretation, *bu ren* is not purely other-regarding, but relation-regarding. One who experiences *bu ren* does not perceive the suffering as something that is detached from the relation in which she stands to the victim. Suppose that she watches a documentary of Holocaust victims and is pained by the victims’ suffering. But she does not see her agency as having a bearing on the victims’ situation. In the proposed account of *bu ren*, the painful feeling one experiences when watching the documentary is not *bu ren* even though the painful feeling might be other-regarding. Supposing that the viewer is also reminded by the documentary of circumstances of harm on which her agency has a bearing, then she also experiences *bu ren* for the kind of harm that can be alleviated in the present or prevented in the future.³⁴ In *bu ren*, one’s attention is not only on the circumstances that others are in, but also on the relation between one’s agency and the circumstances that others are in. If my account of *bu ren* is right, then the early Confucian conception of sympathy might permit more than just the other-regarding perspective. Or, it is possible that the early Confucians have not subscribed to the self-regarding versus other-regarding distinction at all.

Another area of research to which the present study can contribute concerns studies that seek to deepen understanding of *ce yin*. In this article, I focus mainly on developing an interpretation of *bu ren* and sidestep an analysis of *ce yin*. There is no question that the notion of *ce yin* is crucial to our understanding of Mencius’ ethical view. Scholars have generally agreed that *ce yin* is an immediate and spontaneous painful reaction to others’ suffering.³⁵ Even if we agree that *ce yin* is a spontaneous painful feeling for others’ suffering, there is still much more that we need to learn about *ce yin*. However, there are few textual resources to allow us to analyze *ce yin*. The term *ce yin* appears in only two passages, 2A:6 and 6A:6. In both, Mencius makes the similar point that human beings all have the heart/mind of *ce yin* and that *ce yin* is the sprout of *ren*.

We may draw on the proposed interpretation to further our understanding of *ce yin*. Whatever the precise relation is between *ce yin* and *bu ren*—perhaps *ce yin* is made possible by *bu ren*, or perhaps it is the activated state of *bu ren*—it is obvious that the two states are intimately connected. If my interpretation of *bu ren* is on the right track, then it is likely that *ce yin* also consists in the relation between oneself and others. It requires one to take on an unmediated perspective and an involved stance. This will mean that the pain one experiences in *ce yin* is not a result of taking on the victim’s perspective or a third-person perspective. This contrasts with any view that says the painful feeling experienced in *ce yin* is a result of simulating, mirroring, replicating, or imagining others’ pain.³⁶

We can also better understand the process of developing *ce yin*. If *ce yin* also requires an involved stance, one should by default see the plight of

others as making a call for her help. If for some reason one does not do anything to alleviate the plight of others, then she must have silenced what she sees as a call for her help. Since Mencius thinks that all human beings have the heart/mind of *ce yin*, he probably thinks that we naturally see ourselves as involved in the circumstances of harm that others are in. In the odd cases where one repeatedly harms others or fails to alleviate the plight of others, she must either be psychologically disturbed by the call for her help or she has numbed herself in such a way that she no longer feels disturbed by such calls. Then, the process of developing the heart/mind of *ce yin* is one that is not so much about making oneself sensitive to the plight of others as about preventing one from numbing oneself. This can make sense of the sprout analogy. The sprout of *ce yin* is already disposed in such a way that it will be sensitive to the plight of others. Under normal circumstances, it will simply grow along that trajectory. It is more important that one does not injure the sprout, such as by pulling it (2A:2), and cause the heart/mind to become numb to the plight of others.

VII. Conclusion

This study has attempted to analyze the psychological conditions of *bu ren*. To summarize, the necessary psychological conditions of one who experiences *bu ren* are these: she does not want the victim to be harmed, and she sees, from an unmediated perspective, that her agency is already involved in some particular victim's circumstances and that her agency will make a difference whether the victim is harmed. Since Mencius thinks that preserving the heart/mind of *bu ren* is linked to the development of *ren*, a crucial part of self-cultivation must involve the obtaining of these psychological conditions. That said, I am not suggesting that *bu ren* is the only way in which one can be sensitive to the plight of others, and I am not arguing for the merit of *bu ren* over these other psychological states. There is still much more conceptual work to be done in order for us to arrive at a better understanding of *bu ren*.

Notes

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reviewers for their detailed comments. I am particularly grateful to Sinyee Chan and Kwong-loi Shun for helping me think through this topic and letting me consult their work in progress.

- 1 – According to Mencius, if the king extends (*tui* 推) his kindness, he can institute benevolent government and protect his people. The idea of extending kindness has attracted much scholarly debate. In the present article, I will bracket this important issue and focus on the idea of *bu ren*.
- 2 – I tentatively translate *ren*^b 仁 here as “humaneness.” I leave it open that there are more suitable translations for *ren*. (Note that throughout this article *ren*^b = 仁 and *ren*^c = 人.)
- 3 – For a summary of early commentators’ readings of *bu ren* in relation to *ce yin*, see Kwong-loi Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 49.
- 4 – Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 and Xu Qian’s 許謙 commentaries suggest (1). Zhao Qi’s 趙岐 commentary suggests (2). See Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, p. 49. Legge translates *bu ren* *ren*^c 不忍人 in 2A:6 as “a mind which cannot bear to see the suffering of others.” D. C. Lau translates it as “a heart that is sensitive to the suffering of others.” Legge’s and Lau’s translations suggest (1). See James Legge, trans., *The Works of Mencius* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), and D. C. Lau, trans., *Mencius* (London: Penguin Classics, 1970).
- 5 – Kwong-loi Shun, *Zhu Xi and Later Confucian Thought*, section 2.1 (in manuscript).
- 6 – In the *Guoyu* 國語, “Jinyu I,” we see another occurrence of *bu ren* *ren*^c. The point of this passage is that since Shen Sheng cannot bear to harm others, he must restrain himself. We find numerous constructions of “*bu ren* (verb),” where “verb” is an act that involves harming someone/something. See Xu Yuangao, *Guoyu jijie* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2002). In the *Mencius*, *bu ren* is often followed by a verb, e.g., “*bu ren* to eat” (1A:7), “*bu ren* to see” (1A:7), “*bu ren* to use the master’s teaching to harm the master in return” (6B:24). In the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, for example, there is a reference to how Tai Shu “*bu ren* to administer harsh policy” (Zhaogong, Year Twenty). See Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu zuozhuanzhu* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2006). Even in the construction of “*bu ren* (noun),” it is often the case that the object of *ren* is an action that can be taken toward someone or something identified by a noun. In the *Zuozhuan*, there are two instances where *ren* is followed by a noun. In one instance, there is the construction *bu ren miao* 不忍廟 (temple), which can be read as “one does not bear to destroy the temple” (Zhaogong, Year Twelve). In another instance, there is the construction *bu ren hou ming* 不忍後命 (the latter order), which can be read as “the

official Fen Yang does not bear to follow the latter order to kill Prince Jian" (Zhaogong, Year Twenty). There are also instances where *bu ren* is followed by a feeling, e.g. *bu ren xiao fen* 不忍小忿 (insult) (*Guoyu*, "Luyu II"), which can be read as "*bu ren* to restrain *xiao fen*" and "*bu ren* to suppress insult." Even if they mean something like "one cannot bear certain mental states," as in "one cannot bear mild anger" or "one cannot bear insult," this does not affect the present point that in many instances "*bu ren* n" is used in the sense that there is an act that can be taken toward n in the construction "*bu ren* (noun)."

- 7 – Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, p. 49.
- 8 – This means that past harm can also trigger *bu ren* if she thinks that there is something she can now do to correct or prevent a situation that brings about harm to the victim.
- 9 – I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for alerting me to this point.
- 10 – For example, a caregiver might *bu ren* to leave a toddler alone in the playground, even though there is in fact no harm present.
- 11 – I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer's comments on this point.
- 12 – I am only suggesting that the mind of one who is in *bu ren* focuses on whether one's agency has bearing on others being harmed. This does not rule out that there are some other psychological states that focus on the suffering of others for Mencius, such as a state akin to compassion, as suggested by Sin Yee Chan in "Why Does Confucianism Prefer Compassion to Empathy" (forthcoming paper).
- 13 – The considerations of someone who has *bu ren* is different from George the scientist, suggested by Bernard Williams, with J.J.C. Smart, in *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 97–99. Suppose George decides not to take the job. As Williams would describe it, it is because George cannot stand himself being the kind of person who makes weapons for mass destruction. What matters for someone who has *bu ren* is not whether she herself is the kind of person who harms others, but whether others are harmed as a consequence of her agency.
- 14 – I am grateful to Chenyang Li for pressing me to clarify this point.
- 15 – Henry Sidgwick, *The Method of Ethics*, 7th ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, [1907] 1981), p. 382.
- 16 – I owe this example to an anonymous reviewer.
- 17 – Myeong-seok Kim in his analysis of Mencius' account of sympathy criticizes Kwong-loi Shun's emphasis on the spontaneous reactions of alarm and surprise ("What *Ceyin Zhi Xin* [Compassion/Familial

Affection] Really Is,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 9, no. 4 [December 2010]: 407–425, section 2). In the proposed stance, the spontaneous reactions are still significant because they could reveal that one is oriented to others in an involved way.

- 18 – This point about seeing the victim as “this particular person” is also noted by Franklin Perkins, in “Mencius, Emotion, and Autonomy,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 29, no. 2 (June 2002): 207–226.
- 19 – It is said in 2A:6 that the early kings had “a heart/mind that *bu ren ren^c*” and therefore instituted “a government that *bu ren ren^c*” (不忍人之政). In 4A:1, there is a reference to the sages instituting the government of “*bu ren ren^c*” and their *ren^b* overspreading the world.
- 20 – I am grateful to Zemian Zheng for alerting me to this passage.
- 21 – Cf. David S. Nivison, “Two Roots or One,” in *The Ways of Confucianism: Investigations in Chinese Philosophy* (Peru, IL: Open Court, 1996).
- 22 – Cf. Bryan W. Van Norden, “Kwong-loi Shun on Moral Reasons in Mencius,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 18 (1991): 353–370, and Manyul Im, “Action, Emotion, and Inference in Mencius,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 29, no. 2 (June 2002): 227–249.
- 23 – Cf. David Wong, “Is There a Distinction between Reason and Emotion in Mencius?” *Philosophy East and West* 41, no. 1 (January 1991): 31–44.
- 24 – Cf. Craig K. Ihara, “David Wong on Emotions in Mencius,” *Philosophy East and West* 41, no. 1 (January 1991): 45–53.
- 25 – Cf. Emily McRae, “The Cultivation of Moral Feelings and Mengzi’s Method of Extension,” *Philosophy East and West* 61, no. 4 (October 2011): 587–608.
- 26 – *Ce yin* is translated as “commiseration” by Legge in *The Works of Mencius*, and by Wing-tsit Chan in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); as “compassion” by D. C. Lau in *Mencius*, and by Van Norden in *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2008).
- 27 – Stephen Darwall, “Empathy, Sympathy, Care,” *Philosophical Studies* 89 (1998): 261.
- 28 – Nancy Snow, “Sympathy,” in *International Encyclopedia of Ethics* (2013): 5101.
- 29 – There is no dispute that Darwall’s article has made a seminal contribution to the field and to our understanding of sympathy and empathy, but it does little to advance our understanding of Mencius’ view. Without a

clear account of *bu ren*, we are not even in a position to decide whether *bu ren* is sympathy, or empathy, or some other state.

- 30 – Cf. Myeong-seok Kim, “What *Ceyin Zhi Xin* (Compassion/Familial Affection) Really Is”; Shirong Luo, “Three Concepts of Caring,” *Hypatia* 22, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 92–110. While Luo argues that Mencius’ concept of *ce yin* should be understood as empathy, Kim argues that *ce yin* is akin to sympathy.
- 31 – I am not suggesting that fine-grained distinctions of emotions or contemporary theories of emotions are not important. It is precisely because they are important that it is only with a clearer understanding of *bu ren* that we can in future works build more substantial connections to contemporary discussions of emotions. Without a clear understanding of *bu ren*, we will not even be able to decide in which category Mencius’ conception fits best or whether the contemporary frameworks are alien to Mencius’ thought.
- 32 – Darwall, “Empathy, Sympathy, Care,” p. 263.
- 33 – Justin Tiwald, “Sympathy and Perspective-Taking in Confucian Ethics,” *Philosophy Compass* 6, issue 10 (2011): 663–674.
- 34 – I am grateful to the helpful comment made by an anonymous reviewer.
- 35 – The word 惻 as a single-word term does not have many occurrences in texts before the *Mencius*. In the *Yijing* there is one reference to *ce*, which says that when a well is cleared out but not used, even someone walking by the well would have *ce* and feel sorry that the well is not in proper use (*Yijing* 48). It is suggested in Huang Yushun, “*Ce yin zhi ‘yin’ kaolun*” (A study of the character *yin* in *ce yin*), *Journal of Beijing Youth Politics College* 16, no. 3 (July 2007): 54–57, that the character *yin* 隱 in the *Mencius* is probably borrowed from the character *yin* 慝, which has the meaning of being pained. When *ce yin* is used as a compound term, it probably means that one feels sorry and is pained by others. In 2A:6 *ce yin* is mentioned along with *chu ti* 怵惕, which has the connotations of feeling fearful or alarmed in a pressing way. *Chu* 怵 as a single term tends to appear with *po* 迫, which has the connotations of being urged or pressed, suggesting that there is a sense of urgency involved in *chu* (e.g., *Guanzi*, “*Xin shu*,” and *Hanfeizi*, “*Jie lao*,” in *Zhuzi jicheng* [Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1954]). *Ti* 惕 is sometimes used in connection with *ju* 懼, which has to do with a kind of fear (e.g., *Guoyu*, “*Zhouyu I*”; *Zuozhuan*, “*Ding gong*”; *Lushi chunqiu*, “*Shen da*,” in John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel trans., *The Annals of Lü Buwei: A Complete Translation and Study* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000]).

36 – Luo, in “Three Concepts of Caring,” for example, argues that King Xuan’s feeling of alarm and distress at the sight of the ox is a result of both emotional contagion and simulation. The idea seems to be that just as people can have the same kind of feeling by mimicking (e.g., facial mimicry), King Xuan can have a painful feeling mirroring the ox’s painful feeling. Luo also suggests that the king could have put himself in the situation of an innocent man who is about to be executed and simulated the feeling by recalling how he felt when he was wrongly punished by his father when he was young. The king could have simulated the feeling of an innocent man being punished, and it is by drawing on this mediated feeling that the king feels alarm and distress for the ox. In this interpretation, what happens with King Xuan when he feels he could not bear the suffering of the ox is that his own feelings are felt from adopting the victim’s perspective.