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Ethical Transformation in the *Xunzi*: A Partial Explanation*

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I. Introduction

In this paper, I attempt to provide a partial explanation of why Xunzi 荀子 thinks that human beings can be transformed in spite of our problematic nature. I argue that Xunzi has implicitly assumed that the reason human feelings can be ordered is that human beings have the capacity for self-reflection. On the proposed account, the process of ethical transformation is one in which the heart/mind reflects upon the characteristically human feelings one has and in doing so, brings others into regard. The proposed interpretation seeks to make sense of Xunzi's view on ethical transformation without compromising his claim that human nature is bad. If this is successful, it will also shed light on Xunzi's picture of human psychology.

One main motivation for this project comes from the apparent difficulty in reconciling Xunzi's view that human nature is bad (*xing e* 性惡) with his thesis that human nature can be transformed (*hua xing* 化性) to become the kind of person who acts on *yi* 义. Scholars like David Nivison and David Wong have attempted to treat this apparent tension in Xunzi's thought and tried to explain how Xunzi could have coherently maintained these two claims.[1] I share this sense of puzzlement regarding why Xunzi thinks one can be transformed if one's nature is bad and to what extent one can become genuinely ethical in the sense Xunzi means. In my previous studies, I showed that the heart/mind naturally prefers self-interest to the disregard of others.[2] I also attended to the question of how ritual works.[3] I showed that Xunzi's claim that human nature is bad is to be understood in terms of the heart/mind having

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[1] See David Nivison, *The Ways of Confucianism: Investigations in Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Bryan W. Van Norden (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), chapter 13; David Wong, "Xunzi on Moral Motivation," in T. C. Kline III and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the* Xunzi (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), pp. 135–154.

[2] See Winnie Sung, "*Yu* in the *Xunzi*: Can Desire by Itself Motivate Action?" *Dao* 11.3 (2012): 369–388.

[3] See Winnie Sung, "Ritual in the *Xunzi*." *Sophia* 51.2 (2012): 211-226.

a problematic natural tendency to pursue "self-interest" (*li* 利)[4] and argued that ritual transforms the problematic natural tendency of the heart/mind by shaping and ordering natural feelings. It is only when feelings are shaped and ordered in a certain way that the heart/mind, as it were, departs from its natural tendency and becomes one that is motivated to abide by Dao[5] Even if we grant that ritual is indeed effective in the transformation of human nature, there are still some explanatory gaps that need to be filled. Hence, it is the task of the present investigation to probe further into the question of in what sense Xunzi means by human feelings can be shaped and ordered.

Methodologically, I build heavily on the results of my previous textual studies. There are some assumptions I take for granted for my present investigation, which I spell out below. Moreover, I submit that Xunzi himself might not have been concerned with the question I pose or might not be fully aware of the implications I draw from my analysis. My strategy is to take at face value Xunzi's claims that human nature is bad and that ritual is effective in transforming human nature. It is on the basis of these claims that I try to wring out the assumptions Xunzi would need in order to render his argument consistent.

Since I take it that, in stating "human nature is bad," Xunzi is trying to convey certain observations about the natural tendency of the heart/mind, my discussion of ethical transformation is mainly framed in terms of transformation of the heart/mind.[6] The two assumptions I make through my discussion can be spelt out as follows:

> *Assumption 1*: By the claim "human nature is bad" (*xing e* 性恶), Xunzi means that the heart/mind has the problematic natural tendency to pursue self-interest *li* (profit 利) to the disregard of others.
>
> *Assumption 2*: Since goodness is not in one's nature but can only come from artifice, there is no moral propensity or any incipient moral feelings in one's nature.

These two assumptions may be disputed for various reasons; with regard to Assumption 1, one issue at the centre of debate concerns the place, and perhaps centrality, of the claim that

[4] The term "self-interest" is only used as a convenient translation for Xunzi's notion of *li* understood in the sense explained in Section II below.
All reference numbers, except otherwise noted, are to the chapter and line numbers in *Xunzi Yinde* 荀子引得 (*A Concordance to Hsun Tzu*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series, supp. 22; Beijing: Yenching University Press, 1950). Specific passage numbers of the *Xunzi* mentioned are to chapter and section numbers in Knoblock's translation (John Knoblock, trans., *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, 3 vols.; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988/1990/1994). Unless explained or qualified, my translations of other Chinese terms are only tentative and are adopted from common translations for convenience.
[5] When I use the expression "abide by Dao" in this article, I mean the heart/mind makes judgments that are *yi* and is preoccupied with concerns of what is in accordance with Dao.
[6] The relation between the heart/mind and Xunzi's conception of personhood will be brought out by the end of our discussion.

human nature is bad, within Xunzi's philosophy. Donald Munro, for example, argues that Xunzi cannot be very serious in developing a theory of human nature.[7] With regard to Assumption 2, scholars like Fung Yiu-ming 冯耀明 argues that there are some factors in human nature that encourage ethical behaviors.[8] My purpose is not to dispute interpretations that may reject these two assumptions. My strategy is to take Xunzi's claims that human nature is bad and that human nature is transformable at its face value and to extract the implicit assumptions Xunzi would need to adopt in order for him to remain consistent. A successful attempt at extracting these hidden premises will shed light on Xunzi's picture of human psychology that was not fully articulated by Xunzi himself. Having made these two assumptions clear, I now proceed to the core of the issue. It is difficult to avoid certain English terms that are laden with philosophical assumptions, such as "motivate," "ethical standards," and "desire." In this paper I use these terms in colloquial rather than technical sense to facilitate discussion.

II. Before and After Ethical Transformation

Before we begin an analysis of Xunzi's view on ethical transformation, let us first go through some textual details to get a sense of the differences between the kind of person who follows Dao and the kind of person who only pursues self-interest. The main difference between these two kinds of person is characterized respectively in terms of their orientations towards *li* 利 (self-interest) and *yi* 义 (propriety).[9] Xunzi metaphorically describes the difference between someone who abides by *li* and someone who abides by *yi* in terms of the heart/mind being *qing* 倾 (tilted).[10] He sometimes describes someone who abides by *yi* as having a heart/mind

[7] Donald J. Munro, "A Villain in the Xunzi," in Philip J. Ivanhoe, ed., *Chinese Language, Thought and Culture: Nivison and His Critics* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1996), pp. 193–201. See also Dan Robins's in-depth study of how Xunzi's claim "*xing e*" should be read: "The Development of Xunzi's Theory of Xing, Reconstructed on the Basis of Textual Analysis of *Xunzi* 23, '*Xing E*' 性恶 (*Xing* is Bad)." *Early China* 26 (2001): 99–158.

[8] See Fung Yiu-ming, "Two Senses of '*Wei*': A New Interpretation of Xunzi's Theory of Human Nature." *Dao* 11 (2012): 187–200.

[9] Xunzi often juxtaposes the difference between acting on consideration of *li* and on consideration of *yi*. For example, actions made on considerations of *li* are called "business" (*shi* 事), whereas actions made on considerations of *yi* are called "actions" (*xing* 行) (*Xunzi* 22/4–5; K 22.1b/3/127). I abide by the common interpretations in taking the term *zheng* 正 to mean "considerations" or "decisions" and the term *xing* in this sentence to mean good actions rather than any actions in general. *Li* is occasionally used in a broader and more positive sense to denote whatever that is beneficial to the general public (e.g., *Xunzi* 9/72, 18/19). When Xunzi speaks of one's natural inclination, the term *li* is used in the narrower and negative sense. It is in this narrower sense that I discuss *li* in this paper.

[10] Contrast "Only one…who is partial to whatever involves [*li*] to himself to the exclusion of all else, is properly considered a '[petty person].'" 唯利所在无所不倾若是则可谓小人矣 (*Xunzi* 3/44; K 3.11/1/180) with "Staying with what is [*yi*], not swayed by the exigencies of the moment, not given to looking after his own benefit, elevating the interests of the whole state and assisting in realizing them, not acting to change his point of view, weighing the threat of death but upholding [*yi*] and not backing away from it – such is the courage of the [superior person]."义之所在不倾于权不顾其利举国而与之不为改视重死持义而不桡是士君子之勇也 {please give English translation as well} (*Xunzi* 4/19–20;

that does not tilt (e.g., *Xunzi* 12/109, 13/27), as opposed to his description of a petty person having a heart/mind that tilts (e.g., *Xunzi* 3/18). This suggests that whether one is being motivated by *li* or *yi* correlates with whether one's heart/mind is tilted. According to Xunzi, the heart/mind that does not tilt is able to correctly identify right and wrong (*Xunzi* 13/27, 21/27), namely, what is in accordance with Dao (*Xunzi* 21/29–30, 22/74–76). It is only when the heart/mind is in an "upright" position that it can know Dao.

In one passage, Xunzi relates one's not having a tilted heart/mind to not making decisions and choices on *si* 私 and being able to correctly identify right and wrong (*Xunzi* 13/25–26). The term *si* is usually translated as "private" or "personal." In the text, the concept *si* is frequently contrasted with *gong* 公 (public, impartial) to convey the point that one cannot place what is personal before what is at stake for the public (*Xunzi* 8/121, 13/45). *Si* is also used in conjunction with *yu* 欲 (desires) to refer to feelings that pertain exclusively to the self. The emphasis on *si* in Xunzi's usage is on what benefits or favors the self in a way that disregards others. This also explains why Xunzi thinks that one who relies on *si* is partial in their view of things (*Xunzi* 21/3–4) and cannot see things in proper light (*Xunzi* 3/40–41, 12/86). Xunzi clearly emphasizes placing *yi* before *li* (*Xunzi* 4/22) and using *yi* to keep *li* in check (*Xunzi* 18/57–58). In one passage, it is said that although *li* and *yi* are the two things humans have, a good ruler can make their people's preference for *yi* trump their preference for *li* but a bad ruler will do the opposite (*Xunzi* 27/65–67). That the notion *yi* requires one to disregard benefits that pertain only to the self is also reflected in Xunzi's idea that the superior person uses *gong yi* 公義 to trump *si yu* 私欲 (*Xunzi* 2/49, 12/59). All of these suggest that *yi* and *li* are distinct and incompatible with each other. Since *yi* is concerned with acting in a way that is in accordance with Dao, we can make sense of the firmness displayed by someone who acts on *yi*. A person who is *yi* is often portrayed as firm and does not bend himself down. He does not change his standpoint even when he is being offered immense benefits such as wealth and power (*Xunzi* 30/8–9, 4/19–20). Unlike those who act on *li* will pursue anything that benefits themselves, those who are *yi* observe the standards imposed by Dao and therefore will refrain from doing certain things.[11]

III. The Problem and Possible Explanations

K 4.4/1/188, modified). I understand that term *quan* 权 in this content to refer to political or social power held by authority and influential people. Xunzi adopts this sense of *quan* when he uses the compound expression *quan li* 权利 and *quan shi* 权埶 (e.g., *Xunzi* 1, 22). The usage of *quan* in this passage is therefore different from the sense of weighing options when he discusses Dao.

[11] It should be noted that there is a distinction between one's firmness in abiding by Dao and one's rigidity in action. It is exactly because of this firmness in abiding by Dao that one has to be flexible in action. For example, a filial son is required to disobey his father where appropriate because abiding by *yi* is more important than abiding by his father (*Xunzi* 29/3–6). Hence, what Xunzi finds problematic is not one's being flexible in actions as such but one's being flexible in a way that is unsupported by *yi*.

The key question then is why the heart/mind, which has a problematic natural tendency, can be transformed from one that tilts towards *li* to one that abides by Dao. A partial explanation of why the heart/mind can be transformed must in some way appeal to the heart/mind's capacity to *zhi* 知 (know, understand). In virtue of *zhi*, the heart/mind could know Dao and come to approve of ethically appropriate objects. Still, there is an explanatory gap. Since the heart/mind has a natural inclination for self-interest, it is not obvious that the heart/mind will automatically abide by Dao even if it knows Dao. It is also not obvious that even if the heart/mind abides by Dao, it actually takes delight in following Dao or regards Dao as worthy of pursuit in itself. Saying that the heart/mind can approve of objects that accord with Dao alone cannot fully explain why the heart/mind shifts from considerations for self-interest to considerations for what is in accordance with Dao. While a change in the natural inclination of the heart/mind necessarily entails a change in the objects pursued by the heart/mind, a change in the naturally preferred objects of the heart/mind does not necessarily entail a change in the natural inclination of the heart/mind. It is possible that, through learning, the heart/mind comes to choose appropriate objects, the heart/mind may still be guided by its natural inclination in making apparent Dao-abiding choices. This cannot be considered by Xunzi as genuinely abiding by Dao in the sense discussed in Section II.

In the following, I explore some possible accounts of Xunzi's understanding of ethical transformation and identify the shortcomings of each. This does not mean that these accounts could not explain Xunzi's view on ethical transformation, but I hope by critically expressing my worries with each of them, I will be in a better position to motivate considerations in favor of my proposed account. These three possible accounts are based on various lines of thought that have been offered in scholarship on Xunzi. I will only be considering their broad outlines so as to highlight the relevant complexities of the problem. I will use the more neutral term "basis" broadly to refer to the inclination, preference, or motivation the heart/mind has when making judgments. One interpretation I will not elaborate on here, but which is widely held in the literature, is one that understands desire (*yu* 欲) and the heart/mind as two competing sources of motivation with the heart/mind's abiding by Dao arising only as a result of the heart/mind overriding desire. As I have argued elsewhere (2011a), only the heart/mind can motivate action;[12] therefore, the question whether there is a competing basis that competes with the basis for the heart/mind's judgments does not even arise. This, however, does not preclude the possibility that desire-satisfaction[13] is a basis for the heart/mind's judgment. There is no contradiction in saying that desire cannot by itself motivate actions and that the heart/mind has the predisposed goal to satisfy desire. Two other lines of thought I will not consider are: one that holds that the heart/mind has a neutral propensity that can be shaped either way; and another that says the heart/mind naturally

[12] See Sung, "*Yu* in the Xunzi."
[13] By "desire-satisfaction," I mean the satisfaction one derives from obtaining the objects of *yu* 欲.

prefers Dao but approves of the wrong objects because it does not know Dao. These two lines contradict Assumption 1. Let us now turn to three possible explanations for why ethical transformation is possible.

1. First Account

The first account says that the heart/mind abides by Dao for prudential reasons. On this account, the heart/mind always makes judgments on a basis that seeks to maximize desire satisfaction. Since human beings have great needs and desires for external objects and since resources are scarce relative to our desires, human beings have to establish some kind of social institution to allocate resources in order to satisfy their desires. Through the assurance we get from social conventions, we are willing to enter into social institutions and moderate our desires. Human beings also learn that standards that accord with Dao are the effective means of establishing social conventions and institutions. Since the heart/mind has the capacity to understand and calculate which course of action will yield optimum desire satisfaction, it will abide by Dao once it knows that abiding by Dao can maximize desire satisfaction in the long run. Fung Yu-lan 冯友兰 and Lee Yearley offer interpretations similar to this.[14]

There are two difficulties with this line of explanation. The first is that it takes Dao to be a means to achieving long-term desire satisfaction for the heart/mind. However, as textual evidence shows, Xunzi thinks that the heart/mind has to be transformed substantively in order to be considered as genuinely following Dao. As Nivison insightfully points out, "this transformation of self is to be so total that 'The learning of noble people enters their ears, clings to their minds, spreads through their limbs, and manifests itself in their actions.'"[15] This suggests that the heart/mind that follows Dao has to be one that no longer "tilts" towards self-interest. As discussed earlier, the transformed heart/mind is one that adopts *yi* rather than *li* as a basis of judgment where *li* and *yi* are incompatible with each other. But the kind of transformation on this first account is not sufficiently substantive. After all, the heart/mind is concerned only with desire-satisfaction. The second difficulty is that it equivocates the kind of satisfaction derived from obtaining objects of desire, with the kind of satisfaction derived from abiding by Dao. Although Xunzi does think that one derives a pleasure from abiding by Dao, the kind of pleasure obtained from abiding by Dao is qualitatively different from that derived from obtaining objects of desire. Xunzi is emphatic that the former is of a greater and more stable kind than the latter, for the pleasure derived from abiding by Dao stems from a

[14] See Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952); Yearley, "Hsun Tzu on the Mind: His Attempted Synthesis of Confucianism and Taoism." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 39.3 (1980): 465-480.
[15] Nivison, *The Ways of Confucianism*, p. 210. See also *Xunzi* 1/30–31.

transformed heart/mind that is grounded in Dao. This point will be elaborated in the next section.

2. Second Account

The second account, which is also the dominant account in the literature, maintains that preference for self-interest can be transformed into preference for *yi*. Like the previous explanation, it understands the heart/mind as initially abiding by Dao for prudential reasons. Nonetheless, it goes further to say that the heart/mind can come to choose Dao as an end in itself. This interpretation does not ascribe any predispositions to the heart/mind that direct it towards Dao. It maintains that it is through conscious activity and artifice (*wei* 伪) that the heart/mind regards Dao as an end in itself and finds delight in Dao. The kind of self-interest fulfilled through *wei* is often referred to as "enlightened self-interest." This line of thought can be traced in the writings of Antonio Cua, Philip Ivanhoe, and T. C. Kline.[16]

This account is in general compatible with Xunzi's view on *li* and *yi*. It acknowledges that the heart/mind has to change its basis of judgment in order to count as really abiding by Dao. It can avoid the problems in the first account. It is also not committed to the view that the heart/mind has the inherent goal of abiding by Dao, thus avoiding compromising Xunzi's claim that human nature is bad. However, it is not entirely clear how this transformation could take place. If we fill out the account in some detail, a loophole emerges. The story about how the heart/mind which is by nature self-interested can be transformed to one that regards Dao as an end may go something like this: the heart/mind naturally has the goal of maximizing self-interest and has no natural inclination to abide by Dao. It is a fact that the only way to maximize self-interest is to abide by Dao. Once the heart/mind knows *the fact* that abiding by Dao is the only way to maximise self-interest (Thanks. I have added "the fact" to make it clearer. I understand the sentence might be a bit long but hopefully it is clearer), it will abide by Dao. The key assumption here is that abiding by Dao as an end is in fact the *only* way to obtain self-interest. If the heart/mind does not know that it in fact is *the only way* to obtain satisfaction, the heart/mind could be merely abiding by Dao to fulfil its own goal of seeking satisfaction. But when the heart/mind knows that abiding by Dao is in fact *the only way* to obtain satisfaction, the heart/mind's goal of maximizing self-interest becomes identical to the goal of abiding by Dao. An analogy can help illustrate this. Suppose I am a tourist looking for a French restaurant in town but do not know Café D is in fact the only French restaurant in town. I might happen to pass by Café D and realize that it is a French café. The

[16] Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Human Nature and Moral Understanding in Xunzi," *International Philosophy Quarterly* 34.2 (1994): 167–175, especially pp. 173–174; Antonio Cua, "Dimensions of *Li* (Propriety)," in *Human Nature, Ritual, and History: Studies in Xunzi and Chinese Philosophy* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1978/2005), pp. 39-72.T. C. Kline III, "Moral Agency and Motivation in the *Xunzi*," in T. C. Kline III and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the* Xunzi, pp. 135–175.

option of dining at Café D is only contingent to me in this case. If I know that Café D is the only restaurant that fits my goal, there is a shift in the meaning of Café D for me. Provided that my initial goal does not change, going to Café D is no longer a means to fulfil my goal but itself becomes my goal. The goal of going to a French restaurant becomes identical to the goal of going to Café D to me.[17] Similarly, even though abiding by Dao is not an inherent goal of the heart/mind, it can still become a goal of the heart/mind as long as the heart/mind obtains the knowledge that abiding by Dao is the only way to ensure maximization of self-interest. On this view, we need not suppose that the heart/mind has predisposed inclinations towards Dao. We only need to suppose that the inherent goal of seeking self-interest does not change and it is a fact that abiding by Dao as an end is the only way to maximize self-interest.

Still, there is a substantive problem with the second interpretation. It understands the heart/mind's consideration of fulfilling self-interest and that of abiding by Dao as identical in kind. This does not do justice to Xunzi's view that the notion of seeking self-interest is in and of itself incompatible with the notion of abiding by Dao. Abiding by Dao, by definition, requires us to disregard consideration for self-interest. It is highly implausible that Xunzi would treat the two considerations as of the same kind. This is not to say that abiding by Dao will not benefit oneself. The point is that when the heart/mind makes judgments, it cannot choose a particular course of action on the basis of self-interest. The transformation has to be sufficiently substantive such that it constitutes a shift from the kind of person who abides by natural inclination to the kind of person who abides by Dao. This account cannot explain how one can be transformed into the kind of ethical person Xunzi idealizes because it takes abiding by Dao and giving considerations for self-interest to be equivalent in kind but the ethical person is precisely the kind of person who does not have regard for self-interest.[18]

Perhaps a common problem with the above two accounts is their implicit assumption that abiding by Dao has to be a rational decision the heart/mind makes or the result of some kind of practical reasoning. Although Xunzi does think that the heart/mind has to approve of every course of action, it does not mean that the heart/mind itself has to approve of abiding by Dao as if it were approving a course of action. While courses of action are what the

[17] Consider the difference between this case and two other hypothetical tourists, call them Jane and John. Jane always has the goal of going to Café D because the place has special meaning for her. But since she has never been to this city before and since she has no information about the restaurant with her, she has run into many wrong places before she finally finds Café D. John, on the other hand, just wants some French food for dinner (like me). He walks by Café D and realizes it is a French restaurant, so he enters Café D. It is correct to say that, at one point, both Jane and I have the goal of going to Café D. Nevertheless, there is a significant difference in terms of why we take on this goal of going to Café D. I initially just had the goal of going to *a French restaurant*, whereas Jane has always had the goal of going to *Café D*. It was only later when I knew that Café D is the only French restaurant available that I decided I wanted to go to Café D. For John, his goal is always to go to a French restaurant and Café D happens to be a means to achieve his goal. What distinguishes my case from the other two is that extra step I take to identify the goal of going to Café D with my initial goal.

[18] I am indebted to Kwong-loi Shun 信广来 for pointing out this problem to me. I have revised my own reading of Xunzi substantively in light of this problem.

heart/mind chooses in accordance with Dao, abiding by Dao is a stance or state of the heart/mind assumes. A possible way out of the difficulty is to take Xunzi to be saying that the state of the heart/mind is corrected before it knows Dao. In the state of abiding by *li*, the heart/mind will approve of courses of actions that aim for the objects of desire; the heart/mind in the state of abiding by Dao is one that approves of courses of actions that are *yi*. Since the heart/mind that is corrected is already an ethical heart/mind, it will therefore abide by Dao. In this way, there is no need to suppose that the heart/mind itself has to rationally come to decide to abide by Dao. The task then is to provide an account of why the heart/mind can be corrected, rather than why the heart/mind would abide by Dao when it comes to know Dao.

3. Third Account

The third account does not presuppose that the heart/mind is rationally deciding to follow Dao. It regards Dao as inherently congenial to certain innate dispositions that can be developed with proper guidance. If the heart/mind can focus these propensities that are congenial to following Dao, it will judge things in accordance with Dao and abide by Dao. If the heart/mind does not direct its attention to these dispositions, it will direct attention to self-interest. Moreover, the heart/mind has to constantly acquire and refine its knowledge of Dao until it becomes completely in line with Dao. This interpretation implies that the heart/mind inherently has competing tendencies, with the tendency to pursue self-interest initially obscuring the tendency to abide by Dao. The task of ethical transformation is about shifting the heart/mind from its focus on natural inclination for self-interest to propensities that are congenial to following Dao. David Wong and Eric Hutton offer interpretations along this line.[19]

The third account, in the way I presented, is open to an interpretation that potentially undermines Assumption 2. By supposing that the heart/mind has something that is congenial to ethicality, one way to interpret the third account is to ascribe something akin to an ethical propensity to Xunzi's concept of the heart/mind. This will then raise the question whether Xunzi is really entitled to claim that human nature is bad. The simpler way to solve this is to either say that Xunzi has not included the heart/mind in the scope of *xing* or that Xunzi's view on *xing* is not as dim as it sounds. Either way, this risks rendering Xunzi's view too similar to that of Mencius. Granted that Xunzi would have had some substantial grounds to disagree with Mencius, the difference between the two thinkers should be more than just a semantic difference. In the following, I will offer an account that spells out the third account in a way that retains the main claim that ethical cultivation is about developing certain dispositions innate in the heart/mind without attributing to the heart/mind an ethical propensity. This can

[19] David Wong, "Xunzi on Moral Motivation"; Eric Hutton, "Does Xunzi Have a Consistent Theory of Human Nature?" In T. C. Kline III and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*, pp. 220-236 (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000).

help us make sense of why the heart/mind abides by Dao without compromising too much of Xunzi's claim that human nature is bad.

IV. The Proposed Account

The proposed account tries to accommodate both the views that the heart/mind has predisposed preference for self-interest and that there are certain features in our disposition that allow the heart/mind to be transformed. As discussed earlier, Xunzi thinks that ritual can transform human nature and this is to be understood in terms of correcting the natural tendency of the heart/mind. Ritual corrects such problematic tendencies of the heart/mind by shaping one's natural feelings into feelings that are congenial to ethical responses. When one's feelings are thus shaped, the heart/mind is also one with a structure that orients towards Dao in its entirety. In this ideal state, the heart/mind both knows Dao and is committed to abide by Dao.[20] The question that arises here is whether these malleable feelings are incipient ethical feelings. If they are, it will contradict Assumption 2 and fall back into the third explanation. If they are not incipient ethical feelings, we cannot simply rely on the explanation that human feelings are malleable because malleability alone is not sufficient to guarantee that these raw feelings will necessarily develop in an ethical direction. Hence, we need an explanation of why these natural feelings can be shaped into ethical feelings without invoking an account that presupposes these natural feelings have incipient ethical tendencies. I think the most promising explanation is that Xunzi has assumed that human beings are beings who have shared affective propensities and cognitive capacity to have regard for others. It is only when both emotional and cognitive capacities are exercised in an integrated way that the heart/mind can be transformed.

Let us first note the key observations about Xunzi's view on human feelings that are relevant to my account. First, if my previous study is right in suggesting that raw feelings can be shaped, we can at least establish that human beings have certain malleable affective propensities. Under proper guidance, these propensities can give rise to ethical feelings. But this affective capacity is only a bare capacity without any ethical content. Second, Xunzi clearly thinks that there are certain given shared feelings that are common across humankind. One has these shared feelings in virtue of the fact that he or she is a member of humankind. That human beings as a kind have shared feelings is encapsulated in the concept of *qing* 情, which is defined by Xunzi as:

> The feelings of like and dislike, of delight and anger, and of sorrow and joy that are given from birth is called *qing* 情. (*Xunzi* 22/3; K 22.1b/3/127)[21]

[20] See Sung, "Ritual in the *Xunzi*."
[21] The term *qing* that appears in the above quote is usually translated as "emotion." See, for example: Homer H. Dubs, trans., *The Works of Hsuntze* (Taipei: Cheng-Wen Publishing Company, 1928/1996),

The definition tells us that *qing* is given. Later in his discussion of the management of desire (*yu*) in the same passage, Xunzi makes it clear that *qing* cannot be increased or reduced (*Xunzi* 22/56–62; K 22.5a/3/135). More importantly, not only are these feelings given, Xunzi emphasizes that all human beings have one and the same *qing* (e.g., *Xunzi* 3/36, 11/76; K 3.10/1/179, K 11.7a/2/159). As Kwong-loi Shun aptly observes, the term *qing* in classical Chinese texts is often used to refer to "the facts about a situation" or to "certain deep features that reveal what things of this kind are really like."[22] In the *Xunzi*, *qing* is also used in these two senses. For example, one passage refers to the *qing* of music as going to the bottom of the root and reaching the limit of changes. Here, *qing* means what is truly the case of something or certain facts of human beings (*Xunzi* 20/34; K 20.3/3/84). There are numerous instances in the text where *qing* is used to refer to the characteristic features of human beings in virtue of which every human being shares similar likes and dislikes.[23] For example, Xunzi often speaks of how human beings all desire the same things like wealth and the prestige of the Son of Heaven (e.g., *Xunzi* 4/72, 11/23–24; K 4.12/1/194–195, K 11.7b/2/160). Another passage presents *qing* of human beings as what all people do in certain situations, such as dusting their caps when they have just washed their hair (*Xunzi* 3/25–26; K 3.8/1/3). These feelings are

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p. 281; Burton Watson, trans., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968)., p. 144; K 22.1b/3/127. However, Xunzi's usage of *qing* could be quite different from the usage of "emotion" in ordinary English, for 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. I will therefore use the term "feeling" in a loose sense throughout my discussion in order to avoid unnecessary presuppositions. I am grateful to Kwong-loi Shun for alerting me to this point.

[22] Kwong-loi Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 184; see also pp. 184–185 for a detailed discussion of the usages of *qing* in the classical texts.

[23] One important passage that implies it is in virtue of *qing* that human beings share likes and dislikes is the following:

(a) Forms, colors, and designs are differentiated by the eye. Pitch and timbre, bass and treble, modal keys and rhythm, and odd noises are differentiated by the ear. Sweet and bitter, salty and bland, pungent and sour, and distinctive tastes are differentiated by the mouth. Fragrances and stenches, perfumes and rotten odors, putrid and rancid smells, foul and sour odors, and distinctive strange smells are differentiated by the nose. Pain and itching, cold and heat, smoothness and roughness, and lightness and heaviness are differentiated by the body. (b) (*Shuo* 说, *gu* 故) pleasure, anger, sorrow, joy, like, dislikes, and *yu* 欲 are differentiated by the heart/mind. (Xunzi 22/17–19; K 22.2/3/129, modified)

Commentators differ in their interpretations of the first two characters, *shuo* and *gu*. I will not investigate the meaning of these two terms here. My focus is on the succeeding terms that parallel the definition of *qing*. It is interesting how Xunzi draws a parallel between (a) and (b), for the objects that are differentiated by the senses in (a) are external, whereas the feelings that are differentiated by heart/mind are supposedly internal. Perhaps the point here is more about how both the objects in (a) and (b) are given and all human beings will respond to them more or less in the same way. Notice that the things that are said to be differentiated by heart/mind in (b) are almost the same as Xunzi's definition of *qing* (with the addition of *yu* on the list). Given Xunzi's understanding of *qing* as what is given, we can understand this passage as saying that these feelings, upon contact with stimuli, will necessarily be aroused and are then presented to heart/mind for differentiation. Just as everyone's month will find sugar to be sweet and salt to be salty, everyone's heart/mind will also feel pleasure and anger in the same way. Suppose human beings have a natural feeling of like (*hao* 好) for good food, then the feeling of like will be aroused whenever good food is encountered.

deep features of human beings that are difficult to be changed; but they are subject to modification and adornment (*jiao shi* 矫饰). This is analogous to how it is possible to straighten a piece of crooked wood despite the substance of a piece of wood remains unchanged (*Xunzi* 23/5–8; K 23.1a–b/3/151). In view of the observations that both connotations are present in Xunzi's usage of *qing*, we can infer that, for Xunzi, it is a given fact of human beings that we share certain common feelings that will be evoked across all human beings in relevantly similar circumstances. These common feelings are characteristic of human beings as a kind.

Although human beings have characteristically human feelings, these feelings in its natural and crudest form cannot count as ethical feelings. Even if we suppose that there are certain fellow feelings that spontaneously arise in response to others, these crude fellow feelings are bound to be directed to the self, given the self-interested inclination of the heart/mind. Such kind of self-directedness can take at least two problematic forms. Suppose X finds Y in a condition that is one in which all human beings will characteristically feel painful. When X sees Y, X shares the painful feeling of Y. One way in which X's feeling can be self-directed is that it is only when X considers Y with a view to her own interest that X will share the pain of Y, as in "because you are *my* son, I feel your pain." The focus is how other's conditions or interests are tied to one's own interests. But if one cannot see how other's interests are connected to one's own, it is possible that the shared feeling, even though elicited, is not acted on. There is another way in which X's painful feeling can be self-directed even when it is acted on. When Y's suffering elicits in X a painful feeling, the self-interested nature of the heart/mind will immediately direct X's attention to herself so that even if X is prompted to relieve Y's suffering, X is actually prompted to relieve her own painful feelings elicited by Y's suffering. Although X can have fellow feeling for Y in this case, her feeling does not amount to full-blown ethical feeling because the object is still her own interest rather than the interest of others.

I shall argue that there is no need to go so far to take Xunzi to be implying that human beings will spontaneously feel what others feel (which will also render Xunzi too similar to Mencius). It seems that it suffices for Xunzi to assume that there are *characteristically human feelings* such that one will have certain feelings elicited under different circumstances and that the heart/mind has the *cognitive capacity* for self-reflection such that one can reflect on the feelings she herself experiences. By "self-reflection," I mean distancing oneself from one's default mode of operation and taking a reflective view of oneself. This cognitive capacity, in Xunzi's term, pertains to the capacity *zhi* 知. When the heart/mind reflects upon the *qing* evoked, the heart/mind, in virtue of capacity *zhi*, can come to realize that other fellow human beings also share the same *qing*. Such a realization is constitutive of understanding Dao because the standards prescribed by Dao have incorporated *qing*. According to Xunzi:

> Dao, from the past to the present, has been the correct counterweight. (*Xunzi* 22/74; K 22.6b/3/137)

> The sage is one who uses himself to gauge. He uses people to gauge people, uses what is in fact the case/feelings (*qing*) to gauge what is in fact the case/feelings (*qing*), use categories to gauge categories, uses explanation to gauge achievements, uses *Dao* to view everything, the past and the present are one and the same. (*Xunzi* 5/14/35–37; K 5.5/1/207)[24]

Notice that Xunzi draws out a connection between "using *qing* to gauge *qing*" (*yi qing duo qing* 以情度情) and using Dao to view things.[25] In another passage, the sages are said to have knowledge of Dao so that they can differentiate the *qing* of myriad things and put into order what is so and not so of things:

> Those who are called great sages are persons whose knowledge has accessed the great Dao, who respond to changes but without exhaustion, and who differentiate the *qing* and nature of myriad things. The great Dao is the reason for changes and transformations and the subsequent completion of things. *Qing* and nature are the reason they can distinguish what is so and not so of things and what is to be selected and what is to be abandoned. (*Xunzi* 31/17–18; K 31.2/3/31)[26]

Presumably, the reason Dao is a valid standard of all ages is that the *qing* of human beings does not change; hence, one can use one's *qing* to gauge the *qing* of others throughout times. This also makes sense of Xunzi's statement that "Dao is neither the Dao of Heaven nor that of Earth. Dao is what that guides human beings" (*Xunzi* 8/24; K 8.3/2/71). Dao is what guides human beings because the standards are derived from certain characteristic features of human beings. Since the *qing* of human beings are incorporated into Dao, the standards are applicable to everyone. If the heart/mind sustains this reflective point of view long enough through continuous effort in reflecting upon *qing*, one's understanding of Dao will continue to deepen and our crude feelings will eventually become refined and ordered.

[24] 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.

[25] In Yang Liang's commentary on the above passage, he takes *qing* to refer to the *qing* of humans. See Wang Xian-qian 王先谦. *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解. 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), p.82

[26] Although this passage contains the character *li* 理, it is not evident that it is used as a concept. It is used a verb to mean "to distinguish" or "to sort out" but it does not affect our present discussion significantly.

What allows us to put our understanding of Dao into practice is our capacity for *yi*, that is, the capacity to disregard self-interest and abide by what is in accordance with Dao. It is only then that the heart/mind can abide by Dao in an ethically meaningful sense. The ethical feelings developed through artifice (*wei*) differ substantially from our natural self-regarding feelings because the former is structurally different from the latter. While the former is directed only to the self, the latter is to others. The expression of the newly shaped feelings will also be less forceful or violent as the natural ones because they do not arise from the natural inclination that responds to objects in an immediate and reflexive way. However, this does not mean the reflective other-regarding feelings are in any way less genuine or lacking in motivating force. It only means that, conceptually, these feelings are formed through the additional step of reflection without reference to one's self-interest. Once these ethical feelings are formed and ordered, it becomes something durable and gives rise to an ethical character. It is only with such a character that the heart/mind is considered as being in an ethical state that can know Dao and abide by Dao.

This explains why ritual plays such an integral role in the process of ethical transformation. According to Xunzi, ritual is the marker of Dao (*Xunzi* 17/48; K 17.11). Since ritual practices are derived from Dao, they must be practices that have taken into account how a human being will characteristically feel in certain situations. Ideally, these practices have the effect of giving expression to one's feelings and also prompting one to reflect upon these feelings. For example, a son naturally feels grief for the loss of his parent. When the son dresses in plain clothes and eats coarse food in his observance of the mourning rite, he is immersed in practices that give expression to the feeling of remembrance and longing he has for his parent. If he reflects upon these feelings, he will bring his parent into view and understand why there are certain standards required of him in the way he serves his parents. This will direct the feelings he has to his parents rather than himself so that they become a reflective kind of love and respect. The mourning rite is only one example that explains how one's crude feelings can be developed into ethical feelings. Other ritual practices, such as serving one's ancestors or serving one's guests, also have the effect of developing one's feelings for people who stand in different relations to oneself. They work together in a complementary way so that through an elaborate process of repeated practicing and learning, one's feelings are eventually shaped and ordered into ethically appropriate feelings. Hence, an ethically transformed person would never want to avoid or amend any of the ritual practices. The son who loves and respects his parents, for example, would want to perform these rites and serve his duties due to his parents or else he would not find himself at ease. This explains Xunzi's claim that one's *qing* will find rest in *li* if one does what ritual prescribes (*Xunzi* 2/38; K 2.11); it also explains why Xunzi thinks a sage is someone who can think through ritual, does not alter any of the rites, and has fondness for ritual (*Xunzi* 19/35–36; K 19.2d).

A relevant question here is one that has been considered by David Wong: "Even if the feelings of love of parents and grief and remembrance when they die are not yet moral feelings, how could human nature be evil if it contains them? How could it be evil if it contains feelings that are congenial to morality?"[27] On the proposed account, human nature is still "evil" because these feelings are naturally directed to the self. It is important to note that the reflective capacity in virtue of which ethical feelings may be developed itself is not a moral capacity, for it can be exercised in different ways. As Xunzi tells us, one may well distance oneself from one's immediate desires in order to deliberate on the most effective means of achieving one's own self-interest in the long run. Such a person stores his possessions in a safe place instead of consuming them all at once (*Xunzi* 4/63–66; K 4.11/1/193–194). We can infer that, for Xunzi, even though this person might be reflective and also know propositionally about what Dao prescribes, he cannot be considered as ethically transformed if he is only concerned about his self-interest. In this sense, even a petty person can exercise this capacity to maximize his long-term self-interest. This further suggests that in order to exercise the reflective capacity in a way that is conducive to ethical transformation, the object of reflection cannot be one's self-interest but the *qing* evoked. It is only when our affective capacity and reflective capacity are exercised in an integrated way that ethical transformation is possible. Hence, although human beings are naturally endowed with a capacity to reflect, this capacity itself is not a moral capacity. It is possible that, without *wei*, the heart/mind always operates at a pre-reflective level and is still capable of acting on desires and motivating actions.[28] Even if the reflective capacity is exercised, it may still be exercised in ways that go against Dao. All Xunzi needs to assume is that human beings have a malleable affective capacity in virtue of which ethical feelings can be developed, and a cognitive reflective capacity in virtue of which one can distance oneself from one's self-interest and bring others into one's regard. These are bare capacities without an inbuilt direction. For example, a piece of obsidian stone can be made into a mirror when it is ground properly. But the stone does not have a natural propensity to become a mirror. Similarly, for Xunzi, humans are born with the capacities that enable us to disregard self-interest and find delight in abiding by Dao. Yet these capacities are different from ethical capacity in that they do not have an inbuilt force that directs one to Dao. This is probably what Xunzi means by both the sages and the petty person have the same raw material, nature, capacity for knowledge, and capability (*cai xing zhi neng* 材性知能) but the petty persons is not able to use them (*Xunzi* 32/3; K 4.8).

[27] Wong, "Xunzi on Moral Motivation," p. 150.
[28] This is supported by my earlier finding which shows that, for Xunzi, desire (*yu*) cannot by itself motivate action. The implication is that the heart/mind is not by default reflective but has a predisposed inclination. In its natural state, it automatically endorses objects of desire. See Sung, "*Yu* in the Xunzi," especially section 5.

To recapitulate, there are two strands of thought in the *Xunzi*. One strand concerns Xunzi's view on human nature and the possible transformation of such a nature. Xunzi argues that human nature is bad and it is because of human effort (*wei* 伪) that one's nature can be transformed. Xunzi defines *wei* in terms of the deliberation (*lu* 虑) of the heart/mind and regards ritual as what can give rise to the transforming effects of *wei* on human nature (*Xunzi* 23). Another strand of thought concerns Xunzi's view on the problematic tendency of the heart/mind. Xunzi sees the heart/mind as having the natural tendency of the heart/mind to be drawn towards what benefits the self. In Xunzi's language, the heart/mind is easily tilted by objects of desire and is therefore not in a condition to know Dao (*Xunzi* 56–62; K 22.5a). Most scholars have rightly pointed out the importance of knowing Dao for Xunzi; the burden for the conventional interpreters is then to explain why, given our problematic nature, the heart/mind would choose Dao if it knows Dao.[29] This results in the dilemma of either saying that there is a moral propensity in our nature or conceding that our nature cannot be transformed in an ethically meaningful sense.

The proposed account teases out an implicit assumption in Xunzi's thought, that is, both *qing* and *yi* are necessary for ethical transformation. It is only when one's natural feelings are transformed that one can be considered ethically transformed. For this reason, there does not arise the problem of subduing one's feelings when observing Dao. Quite the contrary, these feelings are the resources or raw materials (*cai* 材) one has for ethical transformation. This closes off the gap between knowing Dao and abiding by Dao without undermining Xunzi's claim that human nature is bad. It understands one's knowing Dao as = automatically leading to one's following Dao because the state in which the heart/mind knows Dao is the corrected state. In such corrected state, the heart/mind necessarily abides by Dao. It agrees with the first interpretation that the heart/mind initially only has natural tendency to pursue self-interest but differs with regard to the state of the heart/mind when it abides by Dao. It agrees with the second interpretation that the heart/mind finds satisfaction when abiding by Dao but disagrees that such satisfaction is transformed out of desire-satisfaction. My contention is that, for Xunzi, when one abides by Dao, one's heart/mind is making judgments on a basis that is distinctively different from the one it adopts at default. It agrees with the third interpretation that there are certain dispositions in human beings that need to be developed but avoids committing to the claim that these dispositions themselves are ethical dispositions. The proposed interpretation does not suppose that there is an inherent force in the heart/mind that pulls the heart/mind away from its natural inclination. Even though we have a natural capacity for *qing* and *yi* in virtue of which ethical transformation is possible, this does not mean that the capacity has a predisposed direction of development, an inherent motivating force, or a moral content written in it.

[29] See Nivison, *The Ways of Confucianism*, chapter 13, for an in-depth analysis of the various difficulties with understanding why one will choose Dao.

The proposed interpretation also has the advantage of blocking one potential challenge to Assumption 2 from another direction, which says that if there is nothing in one's nature that can be considered as "good" in the ethical sense, then to what extent can Xunzi really claim that human beings can be "good" (*shan* 善)? In the literature, there is palpable disfavor against the interpretation that goodness is not innate and therefore needs to be acquired. In D. C. Lau's view, for example, goodness, "if it is acquired, does not possess the same significance as it would if it were part of original human nature."[30] This hesitation to acknowledge acquired goodness as having the same status as "true" goodness often stems from the view that the heart/mind has no substantial attachment to goodness. The worry here is that even if the heart/mind is made good, the acquired goodness is lacking in something as compared with inherent goodness. In defence of Assumption 2, when Xunzi says that *xing* can be transformed, he clearly means more than mere compliance with social conventions. As we have seen in our discussion, one who has acquired goodness is one whose feelings are ordered in an ethically appropriate way and whose character is radically transformed. Hence, there is no reason to think that the transformed heart/mind is less capable of following Dao than a supposedly naturally good heart/mind, though this is not to say that the transformed heart/mind is not subject to the risk of reversion.[31]

Here, I shall briefly highlight three implications of my proposed interpretation on our understanding of other aspects of Xunzi's thought and reserve detailed analyses for future discussion. First, the proposed interpretation sheds light on Xunzi's picture of human psychology; more specifically, it brings out the connection between the heart/mind's natural preoccupation with self-interest and the *zhi* 知 (knowledge, understanding) of heart/mind being obscured (*bi* 蔽). While both are problematic in Xunzi's view, the problem that needs to be tackled first has to be the problem of obscurity. It is necessary for *zhi* to be activated so that the heart/mind can reflect and come to understand why certain ethical standards are prescribed by Dao. Hence, on the proposed account, the focus of ethical task for Xunzi is not to curb the natural inclination of the heart/mind as such but to exercise *zhi* so that one can distance oneself from one's preoccupation with self-interest and thereby bring others into view. If this is right, the proposed account can shed light on the concept *zhi* 知 in the *Xunzi*.

The second implication concerns Xunzi's conception of personhood. On the proposed interpretation, it is very likely that Xunzi has regarded the heart/mind as constitutive of personhood. The heart/mind is either understood by Xunzi as being identical to the person or, at the very least, a defining capacity of the person, for the state of the heart/mind is also the state of the person. Whether a person is ethical is tantamount to whether her heart/mind is in an ethical state. The different states the heart/mind is in determine the different states the whole person is in. Hence, it is possible for the entire person to be shifting between an ethical

[30] D. C. Lau, "Theories of Human Nature in Mencius and Shyuntzyy," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 15.3 (1953): 561.
[31] I will reserve discussion of this topic for another occasion.

and a natural state. This also hints at an area of substantive difference between Xunzi and Mencius. For the present purpose, it suffices to note that, on Xunzi's picture, the person as a whole could orient to two different directions or shift between two different states; On the Mencian picture, there are two forces in the person, the heart/mind (the greater part) and the bodily desires (the lesser part), that pull the person apart (*Mencius* 6A:15). Hence, even though both Xunzi and Mencius attribute importance to the development of our natural feelings, the nature of cultivation differs substantially for the two thinkers. For Xunzi, the process of transforming natural feelings into ethical feelings is a process of correcting the heart/mind. The natural feelings are qualitatively different from the ethical ones. But for Mencius, the process of cultivating feelings is a process of expanding or strengthening the heart/mind, for these feelings are already ethical feelings that pertain to the heart/mind but not to the body.

Third, that ritual practices order feelings in light of characteristic features of human beings (*qing*) is also a point worth noting. Xunzi would be making the generic claim that given we are human beings, our raw feelings can be shaped into feelings that are conducive to ethical practices by ritual. A consequence of this view is that there is certain structural similarity that is common across all human beings' affective states. If this is correct, then, an implicit assumption Xunzi has made is that human beings are beings who have *qing*, by virtue of which we share the same way of affectively responding to others. Again, what differentiates Xunzi from Mencius is that these feelings are not naturally structured in a way that is conducive to ethical practices. For Xunzi, it is through deliberation and constant effort of the heart/mind (*wei*) that these feelings are shaped and ordered.

V. Concluding Remarks

An important claim I made is that it is through learning and engaging in ritual practices that the heart/mind is prompted to exercise one's reflective capacity and reflect upon the characteristically human feelings. By taking this reflective view of oneself, the heart/mind realizes that the self and others are related in virtue of being members of humankind and understands why certain ethical standards are prescribed. If the heart/mind engages with this reflective perspective long enough, one's crude feelings will be shaped into the ethically appropriate kind. Although the proposed account offered above does not contradict the two assumptions stated in the beginning, there are still possible ways in which it can be filled out to challenge Assumption 2. This has to do with several unresolved ambiguities. One ambiguity concerns whether knowledge of Dao is latent in the heart/mind so that one can immediately access upon reflection or whether knowledge of Dao is something external to the heart/mind that is acquired through reflection. Although I have argued that reflection itself is an acquired effort, it is still compatible with the possibility that the object of reflection,

namely, Dao, is latent in one's heart/mind. Second, it is unclear how ritual practices are connected to reflection and why or how one starts to exercise one's reflective capacity. Is it an entirely voluntary matter or is it something that can be caused and activated by accumulated learning and engagement in ritual?[32] If it is the latter, how did the first sage come about? The proposed interpretation can be filled out in greater detail once we have sorted out the abovementioned ambiguities that have to do with different aspects of Xunzi's thought. Due to the scope of this paper, I am not able to sort out these important ambiguities and I do not pretend that I have a full answer to the question why human nature can be transformed. What I have done in this paper is to propose a new route to consider the problem of ethical transformation in Xunzi's thought in a way that does not compromise his claim that human nature is bad. This departs significantly from a traditional line of interpretation that holds *qing* to be irrelevant to ethical transformation.[33] Having prepared the ground, my future investigation will turn to the questions of what exercising *zhi* involves and how the content of *zhi* is acquired.

[32] I am indebted to Karyn Lai for pressing this point.

[33] Yang Yunru, for example, explicitly states this view in: "Xunzi Yanjiu 荀子研究," in *Minguo Congshu*, vol. 4 民国丛书第四编 (Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian, 1935).