

Mencius and Dewey on Moral Perception, Deliberation, and Imagination

Abstract: I argue against interpretations of Mencius by Xiusheng Liu and Eric Hutton that attempt to make sense of a Mencian account of moral judgment and deliberation in the light of the moral particularism of John McDowell. These interpretations read Mencius's account as relying on a faculty of moral perception, which generates moral judgments by directly perceiving moral facts that are immediately intuited with the help of rudimentary and innate moral inclinations. However, I argue that it is a mistake to identify innate moral inclinations as the foundational source of moral judgments and knowledge. Instead, if we understand that for Mencius an individual's natural dispositions (*xing* 性) have a relational element, then the normativity of moral judgments can be seen as stemming from the relationships that constitute the dispositions of each individual. Finally, this essay elaborates on John Dewey's account of moral deliberation as moral imagination, an account which also takes the relational quality of natural dispositions as its starting point, in order to suggest the vital role of imagination for Mencius's own account of moral deliberation.

I. Introduction: Moral Particularism, Motivation, and Perception

Xiusheng Liu and Eric Hutton are among the scholars who have noticed the apparent affinity between Mencius's ethical philosophy and moral particularism,¹ a position which holds that moral reasons and motivations are ultimately derivable only from particular situations, rather than from a system of theoretical rules that dictate, apart from any specific context or situation, how one should act. Moreover, they have gone further in specifically seeking to understand Mencian moral particularism in terms of John McDowell's account of moral motivation and perception, which argues that a virtuous agent can have direct knowledge—in the absence of universal principles—of what a situation morally demands by literally perceiving moral qualities in the world, just as if the agent were perceiving so-called “secondary qualities.” On this account, perceiving moral qualities is hence akin to perceiving qualities such as color, in that both sorts of qualities are perceived as being objective features of the world, though they are nevertheless dependent on the nature of human mind for their being able to be detected. Liu and Hutton find support for their interpretation from the fact that, just as McDowell compares moral qualities to secondary qualities, Mencius compares moral inclinations to the innate sensory preferences that are shared by all humans. On their readings, the importance of these moral inclinations—known to Mencius as the “four sprouts” (*si duan* 四端), or the innate moral feelings that constitute the inherent goodness of one's natural dispositions (*xing* 性)—is that they allow the Mencian sage to discern the correct course of action on a case-by-case basis through a kind of moral perception, whereby the sage is able to see each situation in terms of the immediate response of his inclinations. Furthermore, because these inclinations serve as innate intuitions of what is moral, they also provide reasons for action that are necessarily motivating. With McDowell, who believes that, for a virtuous person, the perception of moral qualities

¹ See also Ivanhoe 2002 and Van Norden 2007 for particularist readings of Mencius.

or demands automatically entails that the person is motivated to act on those demands, Liu thus concludes that, for the Mencian sage, there is no gap between perceiving a situation, feeling the response of his moral inclinations, and being motivated to act accordingly. As for Hutton, while his particularist account of Mencian moral deliberation does not go so far as to posit a necessary link between moral judgments and motivations to act, his explanation of Mencian deliberation as a kind of “moral connoisseurship” follows McDowell in basing the production of moral motivation on a faculty of moral perception that directly intuits² moral reasons. Hence, for both Liu and Hutton, McDowell’s account of moral perception in terms of secondary qualities helps us to understand how Mencius links the moral judgments and motivations derived from a particular situation with the innate moral inclinations that stem from a natural source within the human heart (*xin* 心).

However, I will argue that the comparisons drawn between McDowell’s understanding of moral perception and motivation and a Mencian conception of moral deliberation are mistaken. Instead of structuring the normative force of moral particularism around a faculty that directly perceives moral facts in the world by means of innate moral inclinations, Mencian moral particularism would rely on a capacity of analogical reasoning made possible through a process of moral imagination. More specifically, this process of analogical, imaginative deliberation is involved in assessing the various moral values and obligations that are implicated in one’s relationships with others, and then imaginatively extending the treatment that is appropriate to certain given relationships and situations into new relationships formed with others. Hence, to elaborate on how this imaginative moral discernment would work in Mencian terms, I will examine Mencius’s notions of “heart-mind” (*xin*) and “natural disposition” (*xing* 性) with the aim of elaborating the cognitive function of *xin* in its ability to reflect (*si* 思) on situations and comprehend their morally salient features, features which have salience in the first place because of the inherently relational component of *xing*. That is to say, individuals naturally care for others and acknowledge the moral demands that others present in virtue of being related to them, and so it is in taking these demands into consideration through moral deliberation that an individual makes motivated moral judgments. I will argue that it is because Liu and Hutton do not give full consideration to the importance that relationships have to the Mencian individual that they

² The term, “intuition,” is used throughout this essay in spite of McDowell’s objection to the position of moral intuitionism, or the view that moral truths are mind-independent facts in the world that can be known non-inferentially. My use of the term is meant to express the way in which moral perception involves an immediate, non-inferential detection of moral facts in the world, regardless of the stance one takes on the ontological status of moral properties. McDowell’s account of moral perception relies on such a non-inferential process of knowing moral facts, and so the term, “intuition,” can be applied to the McDowellian interpretation of Mencian moral perception as well.

propose theories of immediate moral perception that fail to capture Mencius's own theories of deliberation as analogical extension (*tui* 推) and discernment/imagination (*quan* 權). These models of extension and imagination, I contend, are better suited to resolving the kinds of ethical dilemmas addressed by Mencius that involve conflicts of competing values and moral demands.

Furthermore, I will argue that the plausibility of Mencius's position can be bolstered by drawing a parallel between Mencius's account of moral deliberation and the model of deliberation and imagination proposed by John Dewey. The common ground shared by Mencius and Dewey with regards to their models of moral deliberation stems in large part from their shared understanding of natural dispositions as consisting in transactions between an individual and its social environment, and so I will take Dewey's casting out of these transactions in terms of "impulses" and "habits" as illuminating and expanding upon several important aspects of Mencius's notions of *xin* and *xing*. Given that they both view moral motivation and action as involving the channeling of nascent individual impulses into relationally constituted dispositions or characters, we can then understand why they would view the process of imagination as being of paramount importance to moral deliberation. By imaginatively including another person into one's relational sense of self and then extending the moral feelings and values that are inherently appropriate to that relationship, one comes to recognize not only the particular moral demands that are evoked by specific social relationships, but also the creative possibilities for action that are yielded by a concrete situation, without having to rely on a faculty of moral sense akin to that of sense perception. Therefore, on my reading of both Mencian and Deweyan moral theory, the motivation of a moral action is still occasioned by a response to the salient features of a situation, but in a way that is informed by a background of social relationships and values, such that an agent can analogically extend these values and relationships to act in different particular situations, without having to deduce the right course of action from moral principles or innate moral inclinations.

II. McDowell on Perception and Motivation

According to McDowell, the perception of moral reasons and values is akin to the perception of secondary qualities, properties which are ascribable to objects only insofar as they can appear in perception. The paradigm instance of a secondary quality is color; perception presents the property of color as being objectively present in an external object such that we can have veridical experiences of it, even though the object is predicated as being colored only insofar as it can be perceived as being colored. Now, if moral values are thought of in terms of secondary qualities, then values, like color, will be perceived as being both externally located and as part of a

subjective mental state. In that case, while values can only be recognized by humans who are suitably sensitive to their existence, they still ought to be experienced as being objectively normative and motivating. Thus, the implication of taking values as secondary qualities is that the understanding of the relevant moral values in a particular situation consists in an immediate perception of what ought to be done, and that the motivation to carry out an act should stem directly from the perception of the situation as objectively being a certain way, such that the situation necessarily demands a specific response from the agent who perceives it.

Yet, McDowell goes further in arguing not only that the morally salient features of a situation will provide reasons for the virtuous person to act, but that they will also necessarily motivate that person to act, a position which we can call McDowell's "motivational internalism." On this account, there will be no gap for the virtuous person between seeing a situation as demanding some ethical response and being motivated to act accordingly. This lack of a gap between perceived reasons and the motivation to act means that, for McDowell, moral perception is entirely cognitive. Some accounts of moral motivation (like, for instance, a Humean account) introduce a split between reason and motivation by postulating the need for a relevant desire to be present in the agent, so that while someone can conceptually understand a given reason as demanding the performance of an action, that person will not be moved to act unless he has a certain desire which can motivate him to do so. McDowell, however, argues that there is no intermediate step between reason and motivation for the virtuous person, in that a failure to be suitably motivated in an ethical situation stems from a failure to understand the situation properly, which itself is a failure to perceive the relevant moral reasons and values embedded in the situation. As McDowell writes, "One cannot share a virtuous person's view of a situation in which it seems to him that virtue requires some action, but see no reason to act in that way" (McDowell 1998: 90).

Given that McDowell posits a direct connection between the perception of a moral value or reason in the world and a motivation to act accordingly, we can further appreciate a crucial feature of McDowell's explanation of the motivational force of reasons, which is his contention that the virtuous person does not experience any sort of conflict between competing reasons to act. The motivational force of a perceived reason is so strong that it cancels out, or "silences," any other features of a situation that might appeal to the virtuous agent to act in another way. The potential within a situation for partaking in immoral acts never contaminates the virtuous person's view of the situation, and so they have no reason for performing them. Instead, if the virtuous agent directly perceives a situation

as requiring some moral response, then that perception alone is intrinsically motivating, in that no other ancillary desire or reason is required for the agent to act.

III. Liu and Hutton on the Motivational Force of Innate Inclinations

With this basic picture of McDowell's theory of moral perception and motivation in place, we can begin to address whether a Mencian account of moral reasoning entails the strong connection between the occurrence of a judgment about a particular situation and the motivation to act upon such a judgment that is present in McDowell's virtuous agent. Xiusheng Liu believes that there is such a connection between judgment and motivation, and thus argues that Mencius can be understood as advocating a kind of "motivational internalism" similar to that of McDowell's. Though the respective "internalisms" of Mencius and McDowell are by no means equivalent, especially in light of the fact that McDowell's position does not think that moral judgments issue from innate moral inclinations in the way that Mencius seems to think they do, Liu argues that, because the two accounts both conceive of moral judgment as a form of moral perception, they both come to the conclusion that such judgments are necessarily motivating. Liu's first step in elaborating Mencius's understanding of the connection between moral perception and motivation is to claim that the values of *ren* (仁) and *yi* (義) can be thought of along the same lines as McDowell's secondary qualities. Liu draws the parallel between Mencian values of *ren* and *yi* and secondary qualities like color by citing Mencius's comparison in 6A7 between the heart-mind's enjoyment of moral qualities and the enjoyment of sense qualities by the sensory organs. As Mencius states,

What among the heart-minds of people is common? It is, I say, order and appropriateness (*yi*). The sages first discovered that which is common to our heart-minds (*xin*). Therefore, order and appropriateness please our heart-minds in the same way as meat pleases our mouths. (*Mengzi* 6A7)³

According to Liu, the moral quality of rightness has the same kind of existence as flavor; both types of qualities exist as dispositions in the external world, manifesting themselves when they come into contact with human sensibility while still existing independently of any single instance of being perceived.

More importantly, Liu points to the discussion between Mencius and Gaozi in 6A4 about whether *ren* and *yi* are "internal" (*nei* 內) or "external" (*wai* 外) to show that Mencius should be interpreted as holding a theory of motivation akin to McDowell's "motivational internalism." Now, according to Liu, Gaozi argues that "humanity" (*ren*) is internal but "righteousness" (*yi*) is external in the same way that his love of his own younger brother is internal but his treatment of an elderly person from Chu as his own elder is external. Gaozi's remarks indicate that

³ All translations of the *Mengzi* in this essay are my own.

whereas the love of his younger brother is internal because he possesses a feeling of humanity towards him, his respect for the elder is external because it is motivated by an abstract, externally located quality and not by any feeling on his part. Gaozi respects the elder because of the elder's "eldderness," just as he considers something as white because of its quality of "whiteness," qualities which make no reference to the internal constitution of Gaozi ("whiteness" in this case is not meant as a secondary quality in McDowell's sense). Of course, Mencius contends against Gaozi that righteousness should also be regarded as internal, so that treating elders as elderly, and thus as deserving of respect, should be motivated by an internal feeling of *yi*. Just as a person will eat roast meat, regardless of external considerations about who made it, because he possesses an affinity for eating roast meat, a person will respect an elder, regardless of external considerations about the elder's social position, because he possesses a feeling of deference towards him. Social considerations may determine the manner in which certain people are respected, as in the case of respecting one's uncle normally but respecting one's younger brother during ceremonial sacrifices, but the internal feelings of humanity and righteousness that motivate respect and deference are constant throughout.

From the fact that Mencius apparently locates moral feelings within an agent, Liu concludes that Mencius believes there is a "necessary connection between a judgment of *ren* and the motivation to act in accordance with such a judgment" (Liu 2002: 115). For Liu, Mencius is able to maintain a necessary link between judgments of both *ren* and *yi* and internally located moral feelings because both moral judgments and motivations ultimately stem from a common, natural source within the human heart (*xin* 心). Liu explains this connection between judgments of moral facts and moral feelings/motivations in the following way:

The judgment "It is right to respect an old person" is a true judgment; its truth-maker is a moral fact, namely the quality of rightness of respecting an old person. In other words, the action of respecting an old person possesses a moral quality of rightness.... What kind of feeling marks the presence of moral facts? Mengzi says that they are characteristically human feelings.... This being clear, we can say that *the facts that are established under the influence of characteristically human feelings and sentiments are distinctly moral* [italics not added]. Moral qualities are conceptually tied to certain sensibilities.... With this in mind, the question... "why 'respecting an old horse' does not involve moral approval but 'respecting an old person' does" can now be given a full answer. The former does not possess a moral quality, but the latter does. Why? Because the former does not evoke characteristically human feelings or sensibilities, while the latter does. (Liu, p. 118-120)

Hence, Liu argues, there must be a necessary, internalist link between an appropriate judgment to respect one's elders and the motivation to act in accordance with appropriateness, because *yi* itself stands as a dispositional virtue of *xin*, or human sensibility. Since Liu thinks Mencius's moral virtues mirror McDowell's conception of moral

values as secondary qualities, the fact that respecting an old person is right and appropriate, while respecting an old horse is not, can only be true because a person is disposed to feel *yi* towards old people and not old horses. It is because *ren* and *yi* stand as dispositional virtues of *xin* that a person is able to recognize and make judgments about what is right and appropriate in the world. Because Liu equates these natural dispositions of *xin* with moral motivations, he thus interprets the connection for Mencius between judgments and motivation as fitting with a motivational internalist account; one only makes a judgment to be *ren* and *yi* because one is naturally motivated to do so, in which case moral judgment and moral motivation cannot come apart.

However, Liu's attribution of motivational internalism to Mencius is problematic, in that it is unwarranted for Liu to take the fact that moral feelings are located "internally" within a person as sufficient reason for thinking that Mencius believed in any sort of necessary connection between moral judgment and moral motivation. As A.T. Nuyen points out, a motivational externalist, who holds that moral motivation does not automatically follow from the apprehension of a moral fact, can still agree with Mencius that motivation could be identified with some moral feelings or desires located within an agent, though the externalist would not then conclude there is a necessary connection between those motivating desires and a moral judgment (Nuyen 2009: 6). As evidence that Mencius himself did not exclude the possibility of moral judgment and motivation existing independently, Nuyen cites the story of King Xuan in 1A7. King Xuan knows he ought to help the commoners of his kingdom, and possesses some amount of compassion and *ren*, so that he is not some kind of amoralist, as is shown by his compassion for a slaughtered ox; yet, the king still finds himself unmoved to act. Mencius recognizes that the king is certainly capable of acting with compassion towards his subjects, but that he nevertheless fails to do so. If that is the case, then Mencius should not be read as being an internalist about moral motivation; for Mencius, making a moral judgment does not necessarily produce a motivation to act.

Eric Hutton's own McDowellian account of Mencian moral deliberation tries to bridge the gap between moral judgments and motivation by taking Mencius's innate sprout inclinations to have a capacity for moral judgment that is similar in function to McDowell's brand of moral perception. Hutton works within an interpretative framework provided by R. Jay Wallace, who interpreted McDowell as advancing a theory of moral connoisseurship in which the virtuous person has a perceptual capacity that enables him to "appreciate heterogeneous, case-specific reasons for choice or preference by means of informed judgment or perception rather than the application of general principles or procedures" (Wallace 1991: 488-9). Hutton elaborates on this model of moral connoisseurship by

clarifying two possible versions that take different stances on how the reasons produced by moral perception or judgment are connected to motivation. One version is what Hutton calls “elemental connoisseurship,” where the virtuous agent’s perception merely provides reasons for acting in a certain situation that the agent then weighs and evaluates in order to reach a conclusion about what is the appropriate course of action. At the other end of the spectrum, Hutton defines “conclusive connoisseurship” as involving a perception of reasons that directly motivates the virtuous agent to act accordingly; no separate process of deliberation about those reasons is needed. The model of conclusive connoisseurship is closest to the position of motivational internalism, in that both accounts posit a direct connection between the intuition of moral reasons and the motivation to follow those reasons.

Before Hutton considers the ways in which Mencius can generally be defined as an elemental or conclusive connoisseur, he rightly points out that McDowell’s motivational internalism entails a form of conclusive connoisseurship which should be rejected as being an analogue of Mencius’s moral theory, particularly on the grounds that Mencius does not think of moral reasons as having the power to silence all other possible reasons. If it were the case that moral reasons have such a silencing effect for the virtuous person, then Mencius would not be able to maintain in 1A7 that the *junzi* would still feel sympathy (*en* 恩) with the ox even though he is obligated to sacrifice the ox for the sake of a ritual. Accordingly, Mencius says,

With respect to birds and beasts, exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子), having seen them living, cannot bear to see them die; having heard their cries, cannot bear to eat their flesh. Thus, exemplary persons stay far away from the kitchen. (*Mengzi* 1A7)

Mencius thinks it is necessary to keep exemplary persons away from the kitchen precisely because they may come to have moral feelings that conflict with their overarching duties. In that case, since even the virtuous person can still be sensitive to the motivational appeal of competing reasons for action, Mencius must not adhere to McDowell’s conception of motivational internalism and its attendant belief in the silencing power of reasons. Having to deliberate through the weighing of competing reasons would therefore fit the “elemental connoisseurship” model of moral agency.

Yet, even though Hutton concludes that Mencius’s account of moral motivation is not structured in the same way as McDowell’s motivational internalism, he still interprets Mencius’s moral theory as a kind of “intuitionism” that ultimately follows the conclusive connoisseurship model. Like Liu’s interpretation of Mencius, Hutton thinks that Mencius privileges a capacity of intuition that is analogous to McDowell’s faculty of moral perception. For Liu as well as for Hutton, the interpretation of Mencius as holding a position of “innate intuitionism”

means that, while moral deliberation may clarify the circumstances present in a situation, only the moral inclinations themselves are responsible for intuiting the rightness or wrongness of an action and motivating a subsequent reaction. While Hutton points out that the sprout inclinations should be thought of as active impulses instead of just passive capacities, he thinks that sprouts of virtue represent what one really desires and considers good because they are part of one's inborn nature, in which case the function of moral deliberation would be to align one's judgments with what one "really wants by nature." Hutton explains,

Although a Mengzian sage may cite some reasons for why he acts as he does, all of his judgments must ultimately rest on a feeling that this is simply the right way to act, without this judgment itself being a product of reasoning about why such behavior is right. To that extent, Mengzi's moral connoisseurship is much like conclusive connoisseurship. (Hutton 2002: 175)

For Hutton, then, moral deliberation as a process of reflection (*si* 思) is just meant to bring moral judgments into accord with already given moral inclinations, and enhance the strength of those inclinations by extending (*tui* 推) them to motivate moral judgments in all situations. The innate sprouts of virtue are capable of intuitively discerning right from wrong on their own, and these intuitive judgments are simply made explicit and reinforced through moral deliberation.

IV. Mencius and the Relationality of Natural Dispositions (*xing*)

Yet, the interpretations of Mencius's theory of moral deliberation advanced by Liu and Hutton are problematic, because they equivocate between given moral inclinations and human nature itself, leading them to think that these inclinations can serve as a faculty of intuitive moral discernment simply in virtue of their innateness. In place of this "inclinationist" reading, a fuller appreciation of Mencius's conception of natural dispositions (*xing*) would serve to highlight the way in which Mencius understood individuals as being constituted by their social roles and relationships. With an understanding of the relational element of natural dispositions, we can make sense of the moral significance that Mencius attributes to one's relationships by recognizing that the individual virtues or moral dispositions one possesses—which in the context of Mencius are primarily the four Confucian virtues of *ren* (仁), *yi* (義), *li* (禮), and *zhi* (智)—must necessarily be expressed within one's roles and relationships. Moreover, if what it means for an agent to embody the virtues of *ren* and *yi* is to embody these virtues in one's relationships, then deliberating about how one ought to act in a given situation would hence involve reflecting on how facts about certain relationships implicate courses of action that would accord with the virtues these relationships exemplify. In other words, knowing how to be *ren* or *yi* requires reflecting on how to act appropriately in one's relationships.

Therefore, by establishing that relationality is an important feature of such moral dispositions, I wish to suggest a different interpretation of the moral value of these dispositions and their role in moral deliberation than that of Liu and Hutton. Instead of taking the sprout inclinations as the ultimate source of motivation for moral judgments, we should read Mencius's account as relying on a more robust sense of moral judgment that is motivated by the objects of concern presented in and through one's relationships.⁴ Whereas Liu would say that moral judgments are motivated by moral facts that are perceptually detected or intuited through the "influence of characteristically human feelings and sentiments," I would argue that Mencian moral judgments are motivated by deliberating about how to act within one's characteristically human roles and relationships. The difference between the two interpretations centers on what is taken to be involved in generating and motivating moral judgments, which are the means by which one comes to have knowledge of how one ought to act. Since, as we will later see, one's innate inclinations alone are not sufficient for motivating moral judgments or actions, we must come to have a model other than direct moral perception to understand Mencius's account of moral deliberation, that is, the way in which he thinks we can discern how to act morally in a given situation, especially in cases where the various demands being placed on oneself are at odds with one another.

Now, to say that the natural dispositions of an individual have a relational element is not only to say that dispositions are expressed in a given context through one's relationships—at the same time, we should also say that the relationships relevant to a particular context determine how one's dispositions are expressed. David Wong (2004) likewise speaks of the sense in which I am constituted by their relationships insofar as my moral dispositions or traits are evoked by the presence of other people to whom I am related. As Wong puts it, "I am not warm and generous *simpliciter* but warm and generous to certain people, and other ways to other people. If warmth and generosity are part of who I am, then so are the people to whom I am warm and generous. Who I am partly depends on the situation I am in and on the company I am keeping" (Wong 2004: 422). This emphasis on the link between that which constitutes an individual and the actions that an individual performs finds further support in Dan Robins' (2011) explanation of *xing* and its significance in Warring States texts. According to Robins, *xing* should be understood as being responsible for one's actual and active character, rather than as standing for some innate

⁴ My reading of Mencius is thus in broad agreement with the interpretations of David Wong (Wong 2002) and Kim Myeong-seok (Kim 2010), who in their own ways argue against the inclinational reading of Mencian moral judgment by emphasizing the way in which Mencian moral judgments are motivated by directing attention toward an intentional object of concern and construing that object as being worthy of moral consideration. Where my own reading builds on the accounts of Wong and Kim is in interpreting Mencian moral deliberation as involving the imaginative extension of relationships in a manner that is akin to John Dewey's theory of moral imagination.

potential which may or may not be actualized. That is to say, the notion of *xing* refers to the patterns of behavior that one naturally exhibits in the absence of any constraints on that behavior. Assuming that there is no interference present, one is always acting according to one's *xing*. Accordingly, our own interpretation of *xing* as natural dispositions should not suggest that *xing* stands as a merely inert potential in human nature. Rather, *xing* refers to the active expression of one's nature, so that in the context of Mencius, we should say that the *xing* of human beings actively expresses itself in one's relations to others and in one's naturally taking those relationships as having moral significance. As Mencius explains, "The fruition (*shi* 實) of cohumanity (*ren*) is serving one's parents; the fruition of appropriateness (*yi*) is obeying one's elder brother" (*Mengzi* 4A27). An individual can only achieve values such as *ren* and *yi* through acting in ways appropriate to specific relationships. Though the sprout inclinations may serve as the incipient progenitors of these values, in order for these values to come to "fruition" as full-fledged virtues or embodied dispositions, and thus have motivational efficacy for moral judgments and actions, they must be instantiated within one's relationships.

We can see the close line that Mencius draws between who we are and our relationships to others—that is, between the virtues we possess and the relationships in which we act—in 4B28, where Mencius considers how the conduct of another person towards oneself must have a bearing on whether one can be said to have certain virtues. After saying that *ren* consists in caring for others and *li* consists in respecting others, Mencius writes,

There is a person whose treatment of me is harsh and perverse. In this case, the exemplary person surely turns to himself and says, 'I must not be humane (*ren*). I must be lacking ritual propriety (*li*). How should this matter have come upon me?' Were he to turn to himself and actually be humane and have ritual propriety, yet the other person's harsh and perverse treatment is the same, the exemplary person surely turns to himself and says, 'I must not be doing my utmost (*zhong* 忠).' (*Mengzi* 4B28)

Of course, Mencius does not take this line of thought to an extreme, admitting that if another person continues to act harshly and perversely even when the exemplary person is doing his utmost, then that person's behavior should be dismissed as being the product of nothing more than a mere animal or brute. Nevertheless, the discussion of the exemplary person in 4B28 helps to show that the individual possession of moral virtues involves assessing the quality of one's relationships and taking the concerns of those with whom one is related as having moral significance. Further, we see in this discussion that one's relationships need not be merely familial in order to be taken as having moral significance; indeed, the exemplary person is one for whom all transactions with others serve as occasions to reflect on whether he embodies values such as *ren* or *li*, which is to ultimately reflect on whether he treats others in ways that the values of *ren* or *li* would prescribe.

Hence, another reason for understanding Mencian moral dispositions as relational is that, for Mencius, one's relationships have a normative moral status. Accordingly, the claim that moral dispositions are relational amounts to more than just the descriptive claim that these dispositions only manifest themselves in the presence of others. Rather, Mencius is also making the prescriptive claim that one's relationships should determine how one ought to behave in accordance with the values of *ren* and *yi*; indeed, to be *ren* or *yi* is just to be disposed to treat one's relatives in the way they ought to be treated. Mencius states,

As for that which people have not learned and are yet capable of, it is their genuine capability; as for that which people do not think about and yet know, it is their genuine knowledge. Among young children that are carried in arms, there are none that do not know to care for their parents; as for when they reach old age, there are none that do not respect their elder brothers. Cohumanity (*ren*) is treating parents as parents; appropriateness (*yi*) is respecting one's elders. There is nothing else than to extend (*da* 達) this to the world. (*Mengzi* 7A15)

Elsewhere, in 7B24, Mencius explicitly describes *xing* in terms of not only naturally human relationships, but also a relation with the cosmos as a whole; and, in doing so, shows that the relationality of *xing* is both natural and normative:

The mouth with respect to taste, the eyes with respect to color, the ears with respect to sound, the nose with respect to smells, the four limbs with respect to relaxation—these are natural dispositions (*xing* 性), but there is fate (*ming* 命) within them, such that exemplary persons do not consider them as being “natural dispositions.” Cohumanity (*ren*) with respect to the relation between parent and child, appropriateness (*yi*) with respect to the relation between ruler and subject, ritual propriety (*li*) with respect to the relation between guest and host, understanding (*zhi* 智) with respect to the worthy person, the sage with respect to the relation between *tian* (天) and *dao* (道)—these are fate, and they are also natural dispositions, but exemplary persons do not speak of them as being “fate.” (*Mengzi* 7B24)

In these passages, we find the relationality of natural dispositions (*xing*) in both its descriptive and prescriptive aspects. Mencius thinks not only that people have a natural capacity to know that their relatives are worthy of their moral consideration, but that this implicit capacity and knowledge is what motivates one to treat their relatives as they ought to be treated, and also to extend that treatment to those with whom they form new relationships. Exemplary persons recognize that their *xing* naturally entails that they ought to act according to the values that are appropriate for certain relationships, though they do not take the fact of *xing*'s innateness to lessen the normative obligations that their relationships place on them. Ultimately, Mencius thinks we all are disposed to act within our relationships in the ways prescribed by the values of *ren*, *yi*, and *li*, and it is through the constant and habitual expression of these natural dispositions that these values become embodied as moral dispositions, which can then inform how we ought to conduct ourselves in new relationships and societal transactions.

Understanding the way in which the Mencian individual is naturally disposed to construe their relationships

as being normatively significant can help us to reinterpret Mencius's discussion in 6A4-5 about the values of *ren* and *yi* being "internal." Recall that Liu interprets the internality of *ren* and *yi* as suggesting that moral judgments about these values (e.g. "It is *yi* to respect an old man") originate from innate inclinations located within heart-mind (*xin*). According to both Liu and Hutton, the Mencian individual comes to judge that it is *yi* to respect an old man through a sort of moral perception or direct intuition, whereby one comes to have knowledge of the rightness of respecting an old man by immediately sensing the subjective presence of certain feelings and sentiments. On their account, the reasons for judging that it is right to respect an old man, as well as the motivations for acting in accordance with that judgment, just amount to the fact that one has relevant emotional reactions which stem from one's innate moral inclinations.

However, Mencius's dialogue with Gaozi about the internality of moral virtues need not be taken as evidence in support of the inclinational model of moral judgment and knowledge. As Robins (2001) points out, rather than taking the dispute about whether moral qualities are "internal" (*nei*) and "external" (*wai*) as concerning a question of whether or not moral qualities are literally located within an individual's *xin*, the debate between Gaozi and Mencius may be more accurately interpreted as a dispute over whether the virtues of *ren* and *yi* develop within or outside of family relationships. On this reading, Gaozi and Mencius would both agree that an "internal" virtue such as *ren* naturally develops through one's interactions with family members, while Mencius would disagree with Gaozi's contention that the "external" virtue of *yi* must be learned from some source outside of one's natural family. Meng Jizi illustrates Gaozi's claim in 6a5 with the example of respecting one's younger brother more than one's uncle during a ceremonial sacrifice. In normal familial relationships, one's treatment of family members depends on their position within the family, so that an uncle would be more deserving of respect than one's younger brother. However, if it is *yi* to treat the younger brother with more respect than the uncle during a ceremonial sacrifice, then one's natural family relationships cannot be responsible for teaching one why such an action is *yi*, hence making *yi* "external." Mencius, in claiming that *yi* is in fact internal, therefore argues that the normative status of some relationships may not be responsive to natural differences in family status. Yet, that is not to say that these relationships differ in kind from our natural family relationships. As Robins puts it, "Mencius's reply is, in effect, that the relation I stand in with all other people by virtue of our shared humanity is in relevant respects like a family relationship, so that Gaozi's assumption that internal virtues must respond to differences in family relations is unwarranted. My relation to all other human beings is internal in exactly the same sense as is my relation to my

family...” (Robins 2001: 125).

Thus, if we interpret Mencian virtues as being internal to human relationships, instead of being literally internal to individuals, then we can begin to understand how the rightness of moral judgments can be responsive to facts about our relationships, rather than to facts about an individual’s innate inclinations. As Robins argues, we would no longer need to understand the internality of the duties prescribed by *ren* and *yi* in terms of internal facts about one’s *xin*, nor would we come to have knowledge about what is right by simply attending to our *xin* (Robins 2001: 119). The debates in 6A4-5 deal with the question of how one comes to act in accordance with, and possess the virtues of, *ren* and *yi*. The presumption between both sides is that one already knows how one should act in accordance with these values, so the discussion is focused on what is involved in cultivating a moral disposition to act as one ought, rather than on finding the source of knowledge about an action’s rightness.

As for the motivations behind properly acting according to an “internal” virtue, those motivations cannot be identified solely with *xin* and its inclinations; Meng Jizi thinks that a feeling of respect is involved in acting according to *yi*, but he nevertheless argues that an act performed in accordance with *yi* is external, in which case the debate about the internality of *ren* and *yi* cannot be settled by positing that dutiful actions are simply motivated by a feeling of *xin*. (Robins 2001: 122). Of course, *xin* figures centrally in Mencius’s response to Gaozi, and hence in his account of moral cultivation. The innate and universal sentiments of *xin* incline us to do what we ought by leading us to prefer acting morally, in the same way that innate and universal gustatory preferences would incline everyone to naturally enjoy the taste of meat. Yet, Mencius is clear in pointing out that simply having an innate preference for acting morally does not suffice for knowing how to act morally, which is why he thinks that the task of generating the codes and norms that will grant us knowledge of how we ought to act rests with sages, in the same way as the task of pleasing of everyone’s palates rested with chef Yi Ya (Robins 2001: 130). In that case, though *xin* and its inclinations are internal to human relationships in the sense of impelling us to prefer acting morally within our relationships, the process of judging how one should act morally must involve more than just the fact that one possesses certain moral inclinations. Therefore, in the next section, I will begin to outline how Mencius gives an account of moral judgment and deliberation that is more sophisticated than moral perception or the simple intuition of moral inclinations. Whereas the accounts of Liu and Hutton imply that the motivational force of a judgment rests not with any reason that a sage might give for his judgment, but with the innate intuition to which the judgment corresponds, I will argue that Mencius understands moral deliberation as a process in which forming judgments

about the rightness of some action involves reflecting on, and imaginatively extending, one's own relationships, such that one comes to consider the normative force of moral judgments as stemming from the relationships themselves.

V. Mencian Moral Deliberation as Analogical Extension

The process of analogical extension involves the imaginative inclusion of new “relata” into one's relationships, so that the treatment appropriate to similar relationships can be extended to the new relationship. The extension of relationships is crucial because Mencius seems to think that, absent these relationships, the innate moral inclinations alone are not sufficient for producing motivations to act. It is only within a context of relationships that the inchoate moral inclinations have any effect, which is why Xie was appointed by Shun to teach the people about human roles and relationships (*renlun* 人倫):

Between father and child, there is affection (*qin* 親); between ruler and subject, there is appropriateness (*yi* 義); between husband and wife, there are respective roles (*bie* 別); between elders and the young there is precedence (*xu* 序); and between friends, there is trust (*xin* 信). (*Mengzi* 3A4)

In other words, it is through instructing someone about the nature of a particular relationship that the feelings and values characteristic of that relationship come to be evoked. For that reason, Mencius's moral imperative takes the form of “extending the treatment of my own elders to the elders of others, and extending the treatment of my own young ones to the young ones of others” (*Mengzi* 1A7). In other words, it is through the analogical extension of one's relationships that a person can discern how to treat a new member of a relationship, and then extend her moral feelings toward the new member of a relationship, thereby priming her to act appropriately towards the new “relative.”

One obvious objection at this point can cite Mencius's story in 2A6 of a child falling down a well, which shows that a person will have some kind of immediate feeling of sympathy towards the falling child without having an actual relationship with that child. Now, a motivational internalist such as Liu would have to ascribe to Mencius the view that since the moral feeling that arose is innate to the human heart-mind, there must have been a necessary connection between the perception of the falling child, the instant feeling of sympathy, and the motivation to act on that sympathy. However, Mencius does not suggest that the perception of the falling child itself actually motivates the well-watcher to carry out an action; at most, Mencius thinks there would be an instant feeling of sympathy that would be shared by any person who sees the falling child, but this falls short of saying that this innate feeling of sympathy is the sole grounds of motivation, as the inclinational reading would have it. The sympathetic feeling

would surely count as a reason to save the child, but Mencius here does not seem to believe in any necessary connection between such a reason and a subsequent motivation to act on it.⁵

How, then, does Mencius bridge the divide between having a reason and having the motivation to act on that reason? I would argue that it is through the direction of inchoate moral feelings towards an object by means of an analogy that a person can be motivated to act in a situation where she once lacked motivation. More specifically, the process of analogical extension consists in the establishing of a relationship where one previously did not exist, or in the reviving of a relationship that has lost its vitality. For instance, motivating King Xuan to feel compassion for his people ultimately depends on the establishment of a proper relationship with his subjects. The whole reason Xuan has failed to show compassion towards the people of his kingdom is that he has ignored their demands for the sake of waging wars and conquering other territories, and so he can only come to feel compassion for his subjects by “manifesting cohumanity (*ren*) through governance” (*fa zheng shi ren* 發政施仁; *Mengzi* 1A7), that is, by reinstating the proper relationship between a ruler and his subjects and thus realizing the value of *ren* through his relationship (and it is telling that part of manifesting *ren* in governance involves the education of subjects on familial and fraternal duties, which presume the normativity of relationships).

Establishing a relationship analogically, then, involves an extension of a prior, paradigmatic relationship and the values/feelings instantiated therein to the new case in question. Mencius persuades the king to properly instate the relation of ruler and subject and thereby recognize the suffering of his subjects by drawing on the fact that the king has some kind of relation to the suffering ox that entails a feeling of sympathy toward it. It is important that the king actually has some kind of relation to the ox, even if that relation falls outside the traditional roles of *renlun*. Were such a relation irrelevant, Mencius could just as well appeal to a feeling of sympathy for the suffering sheep that was slaughtered instead of the ox. Yet, Mencius does not make such an appeal because there is no relation, or no relevant connection, between the king and the sheep, whereas there is some relevant connection between the ox and the king. This connection stems from the king’s coming into contact with the ox, whereupon the king has a feeling of compassion directed toward it. On the other hand, the king has no such connection with the sheep who remains unseen, and so the king’s innate sprout of compassion, being undirected, remains unfelt and inactive, lacking in motivational force. What’s more, to even arrive at the feeling of sympathy for the ox, the king had to first

⁵ D.C. Lau (Lau 1970: 18-19) and Irene Bloom (Bloom 2002: 100) also point out that Mencius does not suggest that the immediate feeling of sympathy for the falling child will automatically lead a person to act and attempt to save the child.

recognize a relevant connection between the ox being taken to slaughter and an innocent person being executed.

Myeong-seok Kim, who argues that the altruistic character of Mencian moral judgments stems not from one's spontaneous and inchoate inclinations alone, but from a construal of another being's situation with sympathetic concern, helpfully explains how the king relates to the innocent man and his situation through such a construal, thereby judging the moral status of the innocent man in such a way as to produce moral reasons that can analogically guide his consideration of the ox:

King Xuān's feeling of unbearableness (*bùrěn* 不忍) takes the image of the ox cowering like an innocent man going to the execution ground as its intentional object, and...this feeling of the king's is focused not on the imagined fear and despair of the wronged man but on the fact that he was innocent. In other words...the king's feeling of distress comes from his construal of the situation in terms of an innocent creature facing undeserved death, and this construal of the situation is made possible in the first place by the king's concern for a sentient being, no matter how incomplete and capricious it could be at the current stage of the king's moral cultivation. (Kim 2010: 418)

Hence, it is by judging the innocent man's situation and discerning its unjustness that the king comes to have an appropriate emotional response; contra to Liu and Hutton, the king does not determine the unjustness of the innocent man's situation merely by sensing his own subjective moral sentiments. Still, the feelings of *xin* are an important component of the king's moral judgment, in the sense that they vivify his judgment and make the unjustness of the innocent man's situation more salient. Being that the feelings of *xin* are internal to relationships, these feelings must be channeled within relationships if they are going to have any motivational efficacy. Moreover, since Mencius thinks that relationships can still remain internal and be extended outside the scope of one's family, it follows that one's emotions can be felt in response to the moral construal of someone's particular situation, even if they are not a member of one's family. Therefore, if we understand the feelings of *xin* as taking place within one's relationships, and as being occasioned by the moral judgment of another's situation, then we can discern the link between the establishment of some kind of relationship and the sort of "concern-based construal" that evokes such feelings. That is, we can recognize that to be properly related to someone is just to construe another as being worthy of concern and moral consideration.

Returning to King Xuan and the ox, only by analogically extrapolating from his imagined connection to the innocent person and his feeling of compassion for him can the king then recognize a reason for feeling compassion for the ox, and only by extending from his connection to the ox and his feeling of compassion for it can the king then recognize a reason to feel compassionate toward his subjects. In both cases, the reasons for feeling compassion are generated because the king has entered into a new relationship and developed a new connection that evokes his

moral feelings and recognizes moral values. Locating the motivations of a moral judgment in the analogical establishment of relationships, then, reverses the priority of intuition over judgment that inclinational accounts of moral perception have imputed into Mencius's own theory. Instead of positing a faculty of moral perception that looks to innate moral inclinations to intuit the rightness or wrongness of a situation, the process of Mencian moral deliberation functions by reflecting on a situation, assessing the various values/moral feelings that are implicated by the roles and relationships implicated by the situation, and judging the appropriate course of action from there.

Mencius, in his debate in 3A5 with the Mohist Yi Zhi, emphasizes that moral deliberation involves taking one's relationships into account in a way that goes beyond simply relying on innate moral intuitions. Mencius criticizes the Mohist doctrine of impartial caring, which for him would amount to the view that one should have the same amount of affection for a neighbor's child as one does for one's own nephew. He thus charges Yi Zhi with introducing "two roots" (*er ben* 二本) into morality, thereby supplanting the single root (*yi ben* 一本) that is naturally given by *tian*. That is to say, Yi Zhi, by advocating that affection and ethical caring should be equally applied to all irrespective of their relation to us, ignores the natural priority that one's familial relationships have in moral matters. In that case, we can see that Mencius apparently considers such relationships to be the single root of morality. Now, Mencius still admits that one will have a general feeling of sympathy towards any child that accidentally falls into a well. Such a feeling is immediate and does not consider the relation that their object bears to the agent; one will feel sympathy for a falling child no matter whether that child is our nephew or a neighbor's child.

However, Mencius evidently does not think these sorts of immediate inclinations have the kind of moral and motivational importance that Liu and Hutton impute to them, because, to rely only on these inclinations without considering the weighted demands of one's relationships would be to introduce a kind of blind impartiality into morality that Mencius thinks is unnatural and unwarranted. On their own, the sprout feelings, as unreflective impulses, are not enough to guarantee the priority that one's relationships should have in moral affairs, which is why one will have the same feeling of distress and sympathy for both one's nephew and a neighbor's child when either of them fall into a well. Yet, given that intelligent moral reflection for Mencius involves taking one's relationships into account, we can see that moral inclinations do not serve as sufficient bases for making moral judgments, since they cannot themselves determine the normative priority that one's relationships should have. In isolation from a consideration of one's relationships, then, the normativity of moral judgments cannot be "rooted" in these inclinations alone.

The inadequacy of moral inclinations for grounding the normativity of moral judgments is further evidenced by Mencius's account of moral deliberation in 4A17, where he considers the moral quandary posed to him by Chunyu Kun. Ordinarily, the ritual mores of society dictate that men and women should not touch one another, but Chunyu Kun asks whether that means Mencius would not rescue his drowning sister-in-law with his hand. Mencius replies,

To not help a drowning sister-in-law is to be a beast. Men and women should not touch when they are giving and receiving things—that is a matter of ritual (*li* 禮). Helping your drowning sister-in-law with your hand—that is a matter of discretion (*quan* 權). (*Mengzi* 4A17)

In the case that Mencius describes here, deciding what is moral is not as easy as simply seeing the situation by intuiting one's innate moral inclinations, since there seems to be a conflict between intuitions themselves, that is, between the intuitions that would support an action in accordance with the value of *li* and the intuitions that might implicitly support an action in accordance with the value of *ren*. Now, while Mencius implies that the correct course of action in Chunyu Kun's thought experiment would be to save the drowning sister-in-law, an action that presumably would be motivated by compassion (*ce yin zhi xin*), he goes on to argue that such a feeling cannot be relied upon as an infallible guide for action in all situations. When Chunyu Kun suggests that just as ritual propriety should be abandoned to save the drowning sister-in-law, ritual and social norms should be abandoned to save a world that is "drowning," Mencius denies the validity of the analogy, rhetorically asking, "A world that is drowning is rescued with *dao* (道), a drowning sister-in-law is rescued with one's hand; do you wish me to rescue a drowning world with my hand" (*Mengzi* 4A17)? What this response indicates is that Mencius does not think the sprout feeling of *ren*, which provides a reason for abandoning ritual propriety and rescuing the sister-in-law, has such an absolute normative force that it justifies the abandonment of *li* wholesale. Of course, *li* and its attendant sprout inclination cannot be absolutely normative either, since Mencius thinks that the case of the drowning sister-in-law requires an action that contradicts what ritual propriety would dictate. Hence, we should take Mencius's denial that any single moral inclination can provide absolutely normative and universally applicable moral reasons as evidence against interpretations of Mencius that ground the normativity of moral values solely in innate, and hence infallible, inclinations. Chunyu Kun's example demonstrates for Mencius the overall need to find a balance between moral values that is responsive to the unique circumstances of each situation. Mencius thus conceives of these values and supporting inclinations as initial factors to be taken into account in the assessment of a moral situation, rather than as determining the appropriate course of action from the outset. Because different moral inclinations can provide

competing reasons for action, Mencius views moral judgment as discerning what one ought to do by achieving a harmonization between such inclinations, rather than as a means of making it easier for someone to act according to what their innate intuition has already decided. Accordingly, Mencius prescribes discretion (*quan*), or a method of reflectively weighing and judging the demands of competing inclinations in order to achieve an optimal moral outcome.

What is important to recognize is that since the fact of conflicting moral inclinations shows that the innate inclinations cannot be solely responsible for determining what is right in a particular situation and for generating a motivation to act, there must be an inherent element of moral imagination in Mencian moral deliberation. That is, since the perception of a particular situation may not elicit moral facts in the same way that sense perceptions elicits secondary qualities, there is a sense in which creativity is vital to the process of moral judgment. This creativity involves tapping into the possibilities for ethical action, possibilities that arise from, but are not merely determined by, the immediate circumstances of a situation. These possibilities cannot be read off of a situation in the same way as perception passively imbibes sense data, nor should they be automatically deduced from an already given moral principle. Rather, these possibilities are discerned by being creatively generated and evaluated through a process of moral imagination, the outcome of which is the resolution of a moral conflict and the resolve for an appropriate course of action to proceed forward. To better articulate how moral imagination is integral to Mencius's account of moral deliberation as represented by the notion of *quan*, I will now consider John Dewey's own account of moral deliberation as imaginative rehearsal.

VI. Mencius, Dewey and Human Nature

Before considering how Mencius and Dewey offer parallel accounts of moral deliberation as imaginative discernment, we should appreciate the ways in which both of their accounts are grounded in a shared understanding of human nature as being constituted in part by a complex of social relations. Whereas for Mencius the relational character of natural dispositions falls under the notion of *xing* (性), Dewey use the notion of "habit" to express the sense in which an individual is constituted by the transactions it has with its environment. These transactions are mediated by an individual's habits, or acquired dispositions for responding to stimuli in a certain way. To posit that an individual is comprised of habits is to oppose conceptions of the individual as either a substantial self or a complex of given biological/physiological conditions, because, unlike such conceptions, the habits of an individual cannot be isolated from their natural and social surroundings. Moreover, not only do individual habits necessarily

implicate the social environment, but habits also take shape beyond the individual level as customs. Customs represent widespread habits that have become engrained over time, such that the members of society find it more “natural” to act according to these already established habits. In the same way as it is natural for an infant to learn language by learning the language of those that surround it, established customs are often the natural source of individual habits, rather than the other way around.⁶

Broadly speaking, the notion of habit is analogous to the notion of *xing* because Mencius’s understanding of natural dispositions can be thought of in habitual terms as well, where the dispositions of *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi* are the habitual patterns of behaving through one’s relationships with the social environment. Dewey’s understanding of habit as existing at both the individual and social levels means that the four values can be understood not only as individual dispositions but also as the general dispositions of social relations. As Mencius makes clear in 7B24, the four main moral values constitute one’s natural dispositions insofar as they are embedded in societal roles and relationships; these relationships, then, stand as the customs or habits of society as a whole, in that they provide a context for the expression of individual moral dispositions. For Mencius, *xing* amounts to natural dispositions in the same way that habitual conduct amounts to human nature for Dewey, because *xing* is defined by, and achieved through, its manifestation in social relations; habits, like *xing*, form the background of all human interaction within the social environment.

The feelings of *xin* (心), on the other hand, roughly correspond to Dewey’s conception of “impulses” as the basic instinctive inclinations and aversions of the human being.⁷ Dewey and Mencius would agree that the feelings

⁶ Similarly, Mencius in 3B6 compares the inculcation of moral customs to a child learning a language by pointing out how both rely on a sort of social habituation. Just as a child should learn the specific dialect of Qi by being surrounded by speakers of that dialect, a king should learn how to be good by being surrounded by good, virtuous people in his palace. Absent the presence of such a community, the king will lack anyone with whom to do good, and so his own moral behavior will not be habitually reinforced.

⁷ Before we can appreciate any comparison between *xin* and impulse, though, we should recognize that the two concepts are by no means equivalent. Dewey’s broad account of psychology attempts to explain the whole spectrum of human action, so that an impulse can refer to any sort of unlearned, instinctive activity. An infant is born with some set of rudimentary attractions and aversions, as well as a set of activities which amount to no more than pure activity for its own sake, undirected at any particular object. All impulses, whether object-directed or not, are non-purposive, that is, their activity need not be accompanied by any explicit awareness that there is an end to be reached by the activity; a newborn infant just instinctively feeds at its mother’s breast without any explicit idea that doing so will fulfill its hunger. Now, Mencius’s moral psychology is more restricted in scope than Dewey’s, and so Mencius’s innate moral inclinations could at most be considered a subset of the wider set of impulses elaborated by Dewey. Moreover, since Dewey was considering the whole range of human impulses, he was much more comfortable with the conclusion that these biologically instinctive impulses are neither inherently good nor bad; Mencius, however, might not go so far as to say that the sprout inclinations are amoral in this way. Dewey also argues that impulses are extremely flexible, such that, for example, the single instinct of fear may come to be expressed in forms as varied as cowardice, prudence, reverence, or respect (Dewey 1922: 95), but Mencius may not

of *xin* and impulse share a similar status in the constitution of the human being, in that, while impulses are instinctive, their expression is still dependent on habits and interactions with the environment. As Dewey makes clear,

In conduct the acquired is the primitive. Impulses although first in time are never primary in fact; they are secondary and dependent. . . . In the life of the individual, instinctive activity comes first. . . . In short, the *meaning* of native activities is not native; it is acquired. It depends upon interaction with a matured social medium. (Dewey 1922: 89-91)

Like Dewey's impulses, Mencius's sprouts of moral inclination can be thought of as initially unconditioned, non-purposive instincts, which are channeled into the dispositional habits or the patterns of action that are fully represented by the notions of *ren*, *yi*, *li*, and *zhi*. If we keep in mind that these patterns of action are only realized in and through their manifestation in relationships, then we can better understand the way in which Mencius's moral inclinations are innate in every person and at the same time are dependent for their expression on the social relationships that constitute each individual. Understanding the dependency of the moral feelings of *xin* in this way thus helps us to resist elevating inchoate moral inclinations into intuitions that have the kind of normative connection to moral motivation and judgment which the inclinational account attributes to them.

At the same time, we should not then take the dependence of impulse on habit to mean that habit should exist divorced from any impulse or feeling. Habits without impulse are mechanical and rote because they lack any impetus for change on their own; absent any countervailing stimulus towards change, a habit will become fixed in its patterns. Hence, Dewey writes, "Impulses are the pivots upon which the re-organization of activities turn, they are agencies of deviation, for giving new directions to old habits and changing their quality" (Dewey 1922: 93). We can think of *xin* as serving a similar function for Mencius, in that moral feelings are the source (*ben* 本) of vitality for human relationships, nourishing them so that they may further develop. These moral feelings themselves stem from a wellspring of *qi* (氣), or vital energy, and Mencius in 4B18 draws on the metaphor of water to help explain the importance of *qi* for moral growth. Anything that has a root in *qi* is like water that flows incessantly from a wellspring, bursting forward upon filling up hollow spaces; on the other hand, anything that does not take root in *qi* stagnates and evaporates like water in summertime. As James Behuniak points out, the implication of the water analogy is that *xin*, being itself rooted in *qi*, is what "fills the hollows" of *xing*, that is, sustains its vitality and propels its growth, whereas that which stands opposed to *xin* and is not rooted in *qi*, namely external principles or

so be willing to grant so wide a range of flexibility to his innate moral inclinations.

doctrines (*yan* 言), cannot sustain the growth of moral habits and dispositions (Behuniak 2005: 39-40). Yet, as both Dewey and Mencius point out, though these feelings and impulses are the root of vitality for habit and action, they do not stand apart from the process of habituation and moral growth as some isolatable source of moral motivation, because just as Dewey claims that the ultimate end of any impulse is its conversion into a new habit, Mencius claims, “This [*qi*] grows through the accumulation of appropriateness (*yi*)...” (*Mengzi* 2A2); in other words, while the moral feelings, rooted in *qi*, may be the vitalizing source for one’s moral habits and dispositions, the responsibility for channeling and expressing these feelings, or *xin*, still lies with habit and disposition, or *xing*.

Still, though impulses may serve as stimuli for one’s habitual actions, Dewey argues that these subjective inclinations and preferences should not be confused with genuine moral motivation, or genuine reasons for acting. One’s subjective sentiments may consist of evaluative attitudes, but the reasons for why those attitudes ought to be adopted or acted upon cannot be determined by the sentiments themselves. Therefore, the responsibility of discerning moral reasons and motivating actions rests with habit. Jennifer Welchman gives a concrete explanation of habit’s role for Dewey in moral motivation:

Habits, unlike desires, are *not* subjective “attitudes,” pro or con. They are acquired psychological mechanisms through which certain beliefs about our situations come to be directly motivating. Say it is my habitual practice to put my daughter to bed at 8pm and that I come to believe that it is now 8pm. This belief not only supplies a reason for putting her to bed (it is her bedtime), but is also directly motivating *independent* of my desiring or having any other pro-attitude towards putting her to bed simply because it is a trigger for a habitual practice. (Welchman 2010: 190)

For Dewey, moral/value judgments do not motivate actions because they involve a cognitive recognition of moral propositions or facts in the world, nor because they are non-cognitive expressions of subjective attitudes and desires. Instead, Welchman writes, “A value judgment, Dewey holds, is a practical judgment: a judgment about the practical adequacy of a course of action to perform a specific function” (Welchman 2010: 167). In that case, if moral judgments are practical judgments about which course of action one should adopt in a given situation, then, given that habits are the means by which one acts and responds to one’s environment, moral judgments inevitably express and reflect back on one’s own habits. Judgments motivate actions by not only offering reasons for action, the recognition of which triggers habitual dispositions to act, but also by reinforcing one’s habitual dispositions to act in the same way on future occasions. Moreover, judgments themselves are products of one’s habits, so that one’s ability to construe situations and discern reasons for action can itself be reinforced or diminished in the same way as other habits. Nonetheless, what thus distinguishes such judgments as explicitly moral is that they are concerned with

how potential courses of action will bear on one's individual character, as opposed to the more goal-oriented nature of most ordinary practical judgments. As Dewey puts it, some desirable object or outcome "will have a moral value when it is thought of making a difference in the self, as determining what one will be.... The choice at stake in a moral deliberation of valuation is the worth of this and that kind of character and disposition" (Dewey 1960: 134).

Yet, in considering the practical implications of any potential action for one's own habitual dispositions, Dewey argues that one will also taking into account the consequences of such actions for others. That is because the circumstances of one's social environment are a primary influence on both the channeling of natural impulses and the development of habits. As Welchman explains, "The social tastes and practices of our society shape the development of our own desires, habits, and dispositions, directing them to socially approved objects with the result that most of what we will immediately enjoy or find intrinsically satisfying will be objects and practices others share and endorse. And among those socially approved objects are other persons and their interests" (Welchman 2010: 176). Hence, for Dewey as well as for Mencius, humans are naturally disposed to take their social relationships as; being morally significant—"Being human," Welchman writes, "we cannot do otherwise" (Ibid). In other words, given the social nature of one's situation, any sort of deliberation about how to act in a situation will inevitably construe the welfare and interests of others as being important factors in any worthwhile response.

V. Moral Intelligence and Imagination

Dewey explains that the modification of habit by judgments specifically takes place through the "intelligent selecting and weighting of the objects which engage attention and which influence the fulfillment of desire" (Dewey 1922: 20). That is to say, it is only when multiple and conflicting objects of desire or opportunities for action present themselves that intelligence is called into service for the sake of weighing their relative benefits. These multiple alternatives arise in the first place because there is some sort of obstruction to the normal course of action or operation of habit. In Dewey's words, "Thought is born as the twin of impulse in every moment of impeded habit" (Dewey 1922: 171). Similarly, Mencius holds that *quan* is occasioned by the obstructions to habitual dispositions that a morally problematic situation presents, so that the role of deliberation is therefore to guide action by reordering the moral inclinations and dispositions that are implicated. Recall that in Mencius's example of saving the drowning sister-in-law, the habitual disposition for acting according to ritual propriety (*li*) found itself in a situation where it could no longer be counted upon to produce the appropriate action. Thus, Mencius prescribed the

method of discretion (*quan*) in order to fulfill the same role as intelligence fulfills for Dewey: the deliberate balancing of alternative courses of action for the sake of achieving an optimal outcome.

Given that the capacity for intelligent moral deliberation is occasioned by, and seeks to resolve, conflicts of habits and impulses that may arise when a person can no longer respond straightforwardly to a situation, Dewey therefore conceives of moral deliberation as consisting in an imaginative rehearsal of various competing lines of action. While Mencius never develops his account of analogical extension in the explicitly psychological terms of Dewey's model of imagination, Dewey's notion of dramatic rehearsal helps to show why imagination for both thinkers is an integral part of moral deliberation, since imagination involves the creative balancing of possibilities for action, possibilities which cannot exist simply as facts to be detected in a given situation. These imagined possibilities for action are drawn in large part from a stock of prior experiences and habits, such that "actual consequences, effects which have happened in the past, become possible future consequences of acts still to be performed" (Dewey 1922: 225). In the process of dramatic rehearsal, conflicting habits and impulses are mentally tested to determine what their possible future consequences in experience would be like. These acts of imagination are just like actions manifested outwardly in the environment, in that they both are directed towards attaining a certain object or bringing about a certain outcome. Once an imagined habit reaches a desired object/outcome successfully, the action can be carried out in practice; otherwise, an undesirable object, while existing only in one's imagination, will nevertheless inhibit and repel the movement of the action in the same way that an object in the environment can obstruct action. Therefore, as Dewey writes, the purpose of an act of imagination is "simply hitting...upon an object which furnishes an adequate stimulus to the recovery of overt action" (Dewey 1922: 192). Once some combination of habits and impulse hits upon its object successfully in imagination, then the individual can set upon a decisive direction of action. As Dewey explains, "The moment arrives when imagination pictures an objective consequence of action which supplies an adequate stimulus and releases definitive action. All deliberation is a search for a way to act, not for a final terminus" (Dewey 1922: 193). Achieving a decisive course of action through deliberation therefore involves the harmonization of competing habits and impulses, so that the conflict amongst them no longer prevents an action from taking place.

We can thus see how Mencius's model of *quan* has an affinity with Dewey's model of moral deliberation, as well how both models suggest against a conception of moral perception as simple intuition. For Mencius, discretion (*quan*) must be exercised when the demands of different relationships are competing. The process of

deliberation involves discerning these demands and the reasons they provide for acting. These relationships provide reasons for acting because one is habitually disposed to construe them as having moral significance. In taking stock of these relationships, then, one is taking stock of one's own dispositions, which are then analogically extended in imagination to determine how a novel situation would and ought to trigger one's habits and thereby motivate action. These motivating reasons or "triggers" of moral dispositions are discernable because, in the analogical and imaginative extension from one's habitual dispositions to new situations, one is also imaginatively entering into a new relationship with another in order to discern how that relationship ought to motivate an action. Once a relationship/habitual disposition has been imaginatively extended, one's moral impulses can then be directed to new objects; and, if the connection between the impulses and the analogical object is motivationally efficacious, then the individual has established a new relationship that generates reasons for action, thereby successfully balancing the conflicting imperatives of the previously competing values/impulses. Finally, thinking of the process of moral deliberation as a process of imaginative, analogical extension distances Mencius's theory from a model of rational choice, because, as Dewey explains, "Choice is not the emergence of preference out of indifference." Rather, "The occasion of deliberation is an *excess* of preferences, not natural apathy or an absence of likings" (Dewey 1922: 193). The abundance of moral feelings which Mencius attributes to human beings certainly qualifies as an excess of preferences, and so the deliberative process of weighing and balancing these feelings takes the form of imaginative extension. From the already given relationships we inhabit and the feelings and dispositions these relationships embody, we can extend these feelings and dispositions towards new members of a relationship and thereby experience them as recipients of our sympathy, and respond imaginatively to their situation.

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