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RECONSTRUCTING XUNZI'S MORAL KNOWLEDGE

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RECONSTRUCTING XUNZI'S MORAL KNOWLEDGE

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ABSTRACT

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Reconstructing the content of *Xunzi's* (荀子) moral knowledge is the main goal of this thesis. A first main task of this reconstruction is to provide a clarification of the content and functions of *li*. A second primary goal of the reconstruction is to discuss the roles and functions of the moral sage or morally superior person, *junzi* (君子), in Xunzi's account of moral practice. The figure of the sage is important in explaining the rationale of *li* and exemplifying how to behave in accordance with the rules of proper conduct in different situations. As truth is essential to knowledge, it is crucial to understand how moral belief can be truth-apt within Xunzian theory. To that end, the thesis reinterprets the doctrine in terms of Railton's subjective naturalism. In the literature on Xunzi's moral thought, the problem of the cognitive status of moral judgment has been neglected, and this thesis attempts to remedy this oversight.

This thesis is divided into two parts. Part one mainly elucidates the content of Xunzi's moral knowledge. It includes an exposition of the origin and several functions of *li* and the significance of the sage and his or her close relation with *li*. In part two, the argument focuses on whether Xunzi's moral knowledge is truth-apt and reconstructs his position into terms of subjective naturalism.

DECLARATION

I declare that this is an original work based on primarily on my own research, and I warrant that all citations of previous research, published or unpublished, have been duly acknowledged.

(Chan Hok Nam)

22, September, 2008

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL OF THESIS

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Reconstructing Xunzi's moral knowledge is the aim of this thesis. "Li" (禮),¹ which is usually translated into "ritual", "rites", "propriety" or "rules of proper conduct", plays an indispensable role in Xunzi's moral thought. Thus, elucidating the content of *li* is the first task of the reconstruction of Xunzi's moral knowledge. For a belief to be knowledge, it must be true. In other words, only when the content of *li* can be true, is it moral knowledge. Thus, explaining how the content of *li* can be true is the second task of my reconstruction. According to Xunzi, a moral sage or morally superior person, *junzi* (君子) can explain the rationale of *li* and exemplify how to behave in accordance with *li* in various situations because he or she is the founder of *li*. It seems that the Xunzian sage can be the resource for explaining how the content of *li* can be true. Moreover, for Xunzi, the sage is an ideal person in acquiring knowledge. He or she can avoid all the obstacles to knowing the truth, but also can consider all relevant aspects of things without neglecting or overplaying any one of the aspects in grasping true knowledge. By reinterpreting Xunzi's moral thought in

¹ In this thesis, I use pinyin transliteration rather than the Wade-Giles system except for the names of Chinese authors and titles of books which have been romanized already.

terms of subjective naturalism, one of the contemporary metaethical theories, this characteristic of the sage can make the sage be the foundation of the truth of moral judgments. According to subjective naturalism, the truth of moral judgment is based on the attitudes or desires of an ideal person who not only can acquire all relevant factors for making moral judgments, but also is faultless in calculation and rational decision-making. The Xunzian sage can be treated as the ideal person suggested by subjective naturalism, and can thereby be seen as making the content of *li* true. Thus, the second task consists of two sub-tasks. One of these is the goal of elucidating Xunzi's conception of the sage and his epistemology. Reinterpreting Xunzi's moral thought in terms of subjective naturalism and expounding how the sage makes the content of *li* true under this new interpretation is the other task.

Discussing the cognitive status of Xunzian moral judgment is the main theme of the project of reconstructing Xunzi's moral knowledge. This thesis argues that Xunzian moral judgment is truth-apt, and elucidates what makes it true. The cognitive status of moral judgments is one of the topics in metaethics. Actually, metaethics consists of several issues, for example, moral psychology, moral

linguistics, moral epistemology, etc.² Although in previous studies of Xunzi's moral thought, some contemporary metaethical topics have been discussed, the cognitive status of moral judgment has not been taken up. This thesis tries to fill this blank.³ Moreover, after reconstructing Xunzi's moral thought, the thesis can give a counterexample to the prevalent view about the relation between normative ethics and metaethics. According to this view, any metaethical theory is logically independent from any normative ethical theory. According to this prevalent thought, Kant's ethical theory can be interpreted in terms of some metaethical theories, such as emotivism, which argue that all moral judgment is non-cognitive. According to emotivism, all moral judgment is only an expression of one's emotion and it has no truth value. When Kant's ethical theory is interpreted in the light of emotivism, the categorical imperative, for example, "don't tell any lies", is only an expression of one's emotion about the behavior of telling a lie. But this thought about the relation of normative ethics and metaethics cannot apply to the ethical thought of Xunzi. The

² Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, Moral Skepticisms (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 5-7.

³ A. S. Cua is the most distinctive scholar who discusses and reconstructs some metaethical issues in Xunzi's moral thought. See, A. S. Cua, Ethical Argumentation: A Study in Hsün Tzu's Moral Epistemology (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985). As for the problems of moral motivation in Xunzian moral theory, some useful articles can be found in T. C. Kline III and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000). Finally, JeeLoo Liu constructs ancient Confucianism as an objective moral realism. However, her discussion does not include Xunzi. See, JeeLoo Liu, "Confucian Moral Realism," Asian Philosophy 17:2 (2007): 167-84.

firm connection of the subjective naturalistic metaethical status and the content of substantive ethical rule in the moral knowledge of Xunzi will be shown in the course of my theoretical reconstruction of Xunzi's moral thought.

This thesis is divided into two parts. Elucidating the content of Xunzi's moral knowledge is the goal of part one. In this part, firstly, the content of *li* is elucidated by introducing its origin and functions. *Li* can maintain social order because it has the functions of distributing resources and transforming human desires. The transformative function of *li* relates to Xunzi's understanding of human nature. Discussing his idea of human nature is therefore one of the constituents of this part. Finally, the importance of the sage in moral practice is also discussed. The sage's ability to acquire comprehensive knowledge leads to the discussion of Xunzi's epistemology in part 2.

In part two, *xin*, the faculty of cognition in Xunzi's thought, and the factors of preventing people in knowing the truth are elucidated. After discussing these two related epistemological issues, subjective naturalism is briefly introduced. Thirdly, I discuss how Xunzi's moral thought can be reconstructed in the light of subjective

naturalism and how the sage can be source of the truth of Xunzi's moral theory once that theory has been interpreted in terms of subjective naturalism.

CHAPTER 2

The significance of *li* and the sage

2.1 The origin and functions of *li*

Li is one of the basic concepts in Confucian ethical theory. However, it is more significant in the ethical practice of Xunzi than in other Pre-Qin Confucians. Indeed, *li* is indispensable in his thought. There are several English translations of *li*. The most common ones are “ritual” or “rite”. However, in modern English, translating Xunzi’s conception of *li* into these two English words may be misleading because these two terms bear no moral implications or connotations.⁴ On the other hand, the content of *li* in Xunzi’s thought is richer than “ritual” and “rite”. *Li* originally meant “to sacrifice” in ancient Chinese. Initially, it also denotes ritual or ceremony. Later, the scope of application of this word extends to some ceremonialized social activities, such as behavior at court, meetings between ambassadors, mourning, marriage,

⁴ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, ordinarily, “rite” means 1) a formal procedure or act in a religious or other solemn observance; 2) a custom or practice of a formal kind; 3) the general or usual custom, habit, or practice of a country, people, class of persons, etc.; now *spec.* in religion or worship. When “ritual” is used as a noun, it means 1) the prescribed order of performing religious or other devotional service; 2) a book containing the order, forms, or ceremonies, to be observed in the celebration of religious or other solemn service; 3) ritual observances; ceremonial acts; 4) the performance of ritual acts. Xunzi’s conception of *li* overlaps with the above meanings of “rite” and “ritual”. But, obviously, modern ordinary meanings of these two English words have no moral meaning.

communal festivities, etc. Finally, all standardized customs are equivalent to it. Nearly all social activities in daily life, such as ways of behaving toward rulers, parents, the old, siblings, teachers, guests, etc, and personal behavior, for example, clothing, eating, walking, etc, are regulated by *li*. Thus, this word acquires the connotations of “order” and “arrangement”.⁵ As Schwartz says, *li* includes all the familial and political roles and status as well as “all the prescriptions of behavior embedded in these institutions.”⁶ Furthermore, since Xunzi does not rule out the possibility that someone not only is unwilling to follow ritual practice, but also wants to break with such practice, in order to maintain social order it is necessary to threaten such persons by punishment. Thus, the implementation of *li* usually cooperates with the enforcement of laws.⁷ After elucidating the content and functions of *li* in the following sections, it will be clear that in Xunzi’s moral thought, *li* and morality are closely connected. The content of *li* contains substantive moral judgments, rules, standards, and a guidance of being morally sage. Thus, in this essay, the Chinese word “禮” is transliterated into pinyin “*li*” most of the time unless it is

⁵ Donald J. Munro, *The Concept of Man in Early China* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1969), pp. 26-7.

⁶ Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 295.

⁷ This point is related to the distinction between capacity and ability drawn by Xunzi. See section 2.2.6.

appropriate to translate it into those corresponding English words in a given context.

The content of *li* is set forth in the following sections. Firstly, the origin of *li* provided by Xunzi is discussed because the primary function of *li* can be grasped in these terms.

2.2 The origin of *li*

Xunzi conceives of a hypothetical situation in order to explain why people need *li*. In this situation, there is no *li* or rules to regulate human behavior. He says:

The nature of man is such that he is born with a fondness for profit. If he indulges this fondness, it will lead him into wrangling and strife, and all sense of courtesy and humility will disappear. He is born with feelings of envy and hate, and if he indulges these, they will lead him into violence and crime, and all sense of loyalty and good faith will disappear. Man is born with the desires of the eyes and ears, with a fondness for beautiful sights and sounds. If he indulges these, they will lead him into license and wantonness, and all ritual principles and correct forms will be lost. Hence, any man who follows his nature and indulges his emotions will inevitably become involved in wrangling and strife, will violate the forms and rules of society, and will end as a criminal.⁸

今人之性，生而有好利焉，順是，故爭奪生而辭讓亡焉；生而有疾惡焉，順是，故殘賊生而忠信亡焉；生而有耳目之欲，有好聲色焉，順是，故淫亂生而禮義文理亡焉。然則從人之性，順人之情，必出於爭奪，合於犯分亂理而歸於暴。⁹

⁸ Burton Watson, *Xunzi: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 161. In this thesis, I mainly use the English translations made by Watson and Knoblock. Sometimes I modify their translations.

⁹ Xunzi (荀子), “Xing E Pian” (性惡篇), trans. Wang Zhonglin (王忠林 譯), *Xinyi Xunzi Duben* (新譯荀子讀本) Taipei: Sanmin Shuju (臺北市：三民書局), 2006, p. 395. Henceforth cited simply as

In this hypothetical situation, since there are no regulations to control people's attempts to satisfy their desires, eventually, the situation becomes chaotic and disastrous. This is similar to the Hobbesian 'state of nature' in which "every man is enemy to every man" and life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."¹⁰ When people try to satisfy their desires without any constraint, Xunzi claims that human nature is bad, *e* (惡).¹¹ (The issue of human nature in Xunzi's works is controversial and will be discussed later.) To avoid such a predicament, Xunzi advocates that fulfillment of human desires has to be regulated by establishing rules. These rules are '*li*'. This is one of the reasons why people need *li*. In the chapter entitled "A Discussion of *Li*", Xunzi explains the origin of ritual:

What is the origin of ritual? I reply: man is born with desires. If his desires are not satisfied for him, he cannot but seek to satisfy them. If in seeking to satisfy his desires

"Xing E Pian."

¹⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. J. C. A Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 84. In fact, even though Xunzi and Hobbes share the same starting point of establishing social order and rules, they differ in several aspects. Bryan W. Van Norden and David B. Wong argue that Xunzi requires a transformation of human desires and emotions, while Hobbes does not. Benjamin I. Schwartz notices that Hobbes never concerns himself with the character of the ruler. However, Xunzi emphasizes that a ruler has to be morally superior, otherwise comprehensive and detailed laws and rules cannot function properly. See, Bryan W. Van Norden, "Mengzi and Xunzi: Two Views of Human Agency," in *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*, eds. T. C. Kline III and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), p. 122. David B. Wong, "Xunzi on Moral Motivation," in *Chinese Language, Thought, and Culture: Nivison and His Critics*, ed. Philip J. Ivanhoe (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1996), p. 203; and Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 296.

¹¹ "Xing E Pian," p. 395.

man observes no measure and apportion things without limits, then it would be impossible for him not to contend against other men to satisfy his desires. Such contention leads to disorder. Disorder leads to poverty. The ancient kings hated such disorder, and therefore they established ritual principles in order to curb it, to cultivate men's desires and to supply the means for their satisfaction. They saw to it that desires would not overextend the means for their satisfaction, and material goods would not be exhausted by the desires. Thus both desires and goods were looked after and satisfied. This is the origin of rites.¹²

禮起於何也？曰：人生而有欲，欲而不得，則不能無求，求而無度量分界，則不能不爭；爭則亂，亂則窮。先王惡其亂也，故制禮義以分之，以養人之欲，給人之求。使欲必不窮於物，物必不屈於欲。兩者相持而長，是禮之所起也。¹³

In the above passage, it is not only discovered that *li* is used to prevent social disorder and conflict, but also that our desires can be satisfied without being frustrated by a lack of resources. Furthermore, when people fulfill their desires, goods and material are not exhausted under the regulation of *li*. Obviously, for Xunzi, in the situation where rules of proper conduct or other social constraints are established, people can receive great benefits. Avoiding social conflict and satisfying the desires of all members of a community account for the importance of *li*. As for the origin of rules of proper conduct, Xunzi suggests that they are created by ancient kings. In Xunzi's writings, ancient kings refer to the sage kings in Chinese history,

¹² This passage is modified from both Knoblock and Watson's translations. See, John Knoblock, Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works. Vol. III (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 55 (henceforth cited as Knoblock); and Burton Watson, Xunzi: Basic Writings (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 93. Henceforth cited as Watson.

¹³ Xunzi (荀子), "Li Lun Pian" (禮論篇), trans. Wang Zhonglin (王忠林 譯), Xinyi Xunzi Duben (新譯荀子讀本) Taipei: Sanmin Shuju (臺北市：三民書局), 2006, p. 311. Henceforth: "Li Lun Pian."

for example, *Yao* (堯), *Shun* (舜), and *Yu* (禹). In ancient China, especially in the Confucian tradition, these sage kings are regarded as moral sages. In other words, Xunzi thinks that *li* is created by moral sages. For example, he says: “*Li* is the creation of the sages¹⁴ (禮義者，聖人之所生也).”¹⁵ Nonetheless, it is worth noting that regarding those sages and sage kings as ideal persons whose moral performances establish a standard of excellence is better than taking their existence and what they did as historical facts. Authenticating the existence of those sages and what they really did would in any case be rather difficult. Finally, Xunzi sometimes uses the words “sage” and “morally superior person”, *junzi* (君子), interchangeably in discussing the origin of *li*. For example, in the “The Regulations of a King”, he says: “*Junzi* is the beginning of *li* and moral principles¹⁶ (君子者，禮義之始也).”¹⁷

2.2.1 The social function of *li*

In the discussion of the origin of *li*, maintaining human lives and an orderly society turned out to be one of the main functions of *li*. Yet there are other functions

¹⁴ Knoblock, p. 152.

¹⁵ “Xing E Pian,” p. 396.

¹⁶ Knoblock revised, p. 103.

¹⁷ Xunzi (荀子), “Wang Zhi Pian” (王制篇), trans. Wang Zhonglin (王忠林 譯), *Xinyi Xunzi Duben* (新譯荀子讀本) Taipei: Sanmin Shuju (臺北市：三民書局), 2006, p. 121. Henceforth cited as “Wang Zhi Pian.”

as well. Since, for Xunzi, by means of *li*, people can satisfy their desires without exhausting resources, *li* can regulate the distribution of resources, goods and duties among the members of a society. In “On Enriching the State” (富國篇), he discusses how resources and duties are distributed in accordance with *li*:

It is the meaning of *li* that there should be rankings according to nobility or baseness, disparities between the privileges of old and young, and modes to match these with poverty and wealth, insignificance and importance. Hence, the Son of Heaven, king, wears the dragon robes of royal red with its ceremonial cap, the feudal lords wear the black dragon robe with its ceremonial cap, the grand officers wear a skirt with an ornamented border at the bottom and the appropriate cap, and knights wear a hat of skin with their clothes. The *de*, virtues of the person must match his position; his position must match his emolument; his emolument must match his services to the state. From the position of the knight up to the supreme position, all must be moderated through *li* and music. The common people ... must be controlled by law and norms of behavior. To found states one surveys the earth; to support the population one calculates the profits derived from the earth; to assign tasks and duties one measures the people's strength. Employ the people so that they are certain to succeed in their assigned tasks; make certain that the profits from their assigned tasks are sufficient to provide a means of living for them. In all these to cause income to match outgo in regard to clothing, food, and the hundred other necessities of life so that with certainty the harvest surplus will be stored up at the proper season is called the “art of calculating what fits each respective station.” Thus, from the king down to commoners there is no responsibility, however great or small, however frequent or rare, that is not derived from this principle. Hence, it is said: “In the royal court none shall occupy positions out of mere good fortune, and among the people none shall gain a living by mere good fortune.”... If one taxes lightly the cultivated fields and outlying districts, imposes excises uniformly at the border stations and in the marketplaces, keeps statistical records to reduce the number of merchants and traders, initiates only rarely projects

requiring the labor of the people, and does not take the farmers from their fields except in the off-season, the state will be wealthy.¹⁸

禮者，貴賤有等，長幼有差，貧富輕重皆有稱者也。故天子旒褱衣冕，諸侯玄褱衣冕，大夫裨冕，士皮弁服。德必稱位，位必稱祿，祿必稱用，由士以上則必以禮樂節之，眾庶百姓則必以法數制之。量地而立國，計利而畜民，度人力而授事；使民必勝事，事必出利，利足以生民，皆使衣食百用出入相揜；必時臧餘，謂之稱數。故自天子通於庶人，事無大小多少，由是推之。……輕田野之稅，平關市之征，省商賈之數，罕興力役，無奪農時，如是則國富矣。¹⁹

In this long paragraph, Xunzi insists on a kind of distribution made in accordance with the social status and role of each person. For him, equal distribution only leads to the dissatisfaction of each person's desires and, eventually, social disorder. The following is his explanation.

Where the classes of society are equally ranked, there will not be enough goods to go around; where power is equally distributed, there will be a lack of unity; where everyone is of like status, none would be willing to serve the other. Just as there are Heaven and Earth, so too there exists the distinction between superior and inferior, but only when an enlightened king appears on the throne can the nation be governed according to regulation. Two men of equal eminence cannot govern each other; two men of same low status cannot command each other. This is the rule of Heaven. If men are of equal power and station and have the same likes and dislikes, then there will not be enough good to supply their wants and they will inevitably contend. Contention must lead to disorder, and disorder to poverty. The ancient kings abhorred such disorder and therefore they instituted regulations, principles of *li* in order to set up ranks. They established the distinctions between rich and

¹⁸ Knoblock revised, pp. 122-3.

¹⁹ Xunzi (荀子), "Fu Guo Pian." (富國篇), trans. Wang Zhonglin, (王忠林 譯), *Xinyi Xunzi Duben* (新譯荀子讀本) Taipei: Sanmin Shuju (臺北市：三民書局), 2006, pp. 141-2. Henceforth: "Fu Guo Pian."

poor, eminent and humble, making it possible for those above to join together and watch over those below. This is the basis upon which the people of the world are nourished.²⁰

分均則不偏，執齊則不壹，眾齊則不使。有天有地，而上下有差；明王始立，而處國有制。夫兩貴之不能相事，兩賤之不能相使，是天數也。執位齊，而欲惡同，物不能澹則必爭。爭則亂，亂則窮矣。先王惡其亂也，故制禮義以分之，使有貧富貴賤之等，足以相兼臨者，是養天下之本也。²¹

Xunzi thinks that equal distribution fails to satisfy the desires of each person because he holds a special view about human desire. Firstly, he thinks that each person has some common desires.

All men possess one and the same nature: when hungry, they desire food; when cold, they desire to be warm; when exhausted from toil, they desire rest; and they all desire benefit and hate harm. Such is the nature that men are born possessing. They do not have to await development before they become so. It is the same in the case of a Yu and in that of a Jie. The eye distinguishes white from black, the beautiful from the ugly. The ear distinguishes sounds and tones as to their shrillness or sonority. The mouth distinguishes the sour and salty, the sweet and bitter. The nose distinguishes perfumes and fragrances, rancid and fetid odors. The bones, flesh, and skin-lines distinguish hot and cold, pain and itching. There, too, are part of the nature that man is born possessing, that he does not have to develop, and that is true of both Yu and Jie.²²

凡人有所一同，飢而欲食，寒而欲煖，勞而欲息，好利而惡害，是人之所生而有也，是無待而然者也，是禹桀之所同也。目辨白黑美惡，耳辨聲音清濁，口辨酸鹹甘苦，

²⁰ Knoblock revised, p. 96; Watson revised, p. 38.

²¹ “Wang Zhi Pian,” p. 116.

²² Knoblock revised, p. 191.

鼻辨芬芳腥臊，骨體膚理辨寒暑疾養，是又人之所常生而有也，是無待而然者也，是禹桀之所同也。²³

These common desires of people are human basic needs. From the sage king like *Yu* to the tyrant, such as *Jie*, all people have the same basic needs of having food, getting warm, avoiding harm, and so on. Human beings also have some common capacities, such as the five senses. Apart from these basic needs, Xunzi thinks that human beings have some desires which are more than basic needs. The basic needs and desires are components of human nature; but the desires other than these basic needs are not inborn and are caused by external stimulation. Everyone wants to obtain everything to satisfy his own desires but the materials in the world are too scarce to satisfy everyone.²⁴ Since Xunzi comments critically that Mozi worries “about the problem of the world suffering from the hardship of inadequate supplies”²⁵ (爲天下憂不足)²⁶ as “merely a hardship private to Mozi’s exaggerated reckoning”²⁷ (私憂過計),²⁸ he is quite optimistic that the basic needs of each person

²³ Xunzi (荀子), “Rong Ru Pian” (榮辱篇), trans. Wang Zhonglin (王忠林 譯) *Xinyi Xunzi Duben* (新譯荀子讀本) Taipei: Sanmin Shuju (臺北市: 三民書局), 2006, p. 42. Henceforth cited as “Ron Ru Pian.”

²⁴ In “On Enriching the State”, Xunzi says: “All people desire and dislike the same things, but since desires are many and the things that satisfy them relatively few, this scarcity will necessarily lead to conflict (欲惡同物，欲多而物寡，寡則必爭矣。).”; Knoblock, p. 121; “Fu Guo Pian,” p. 140.

²⁵ Knoblock, p. 127.

²⁶ “Fu Guo Pian,” p. 144.

²⁷ Knoblock, p. 127.

²⁸ “Fu Guo Pian,” p. 144.

can be satisfied.²⁹ However, he also notices that all people hardly satisfy their non-basic desires because of the scarcity of goods and that this causes contention and disorder. For Xunzi, under equal distribution, each person obtains the same quantity of resources to satisfy all of his basic and non-basic desires. Although it can help people to satisfy their basic needs, social disorder cannot be eliminated because people probably fail to fulfill their non-basic desires by equal distribution. Thus, he objects to equal distribution and emphasizes the necessity of social hierarchy.

To be as honored as the king and to be as wealthy by possessing the whole world-this natural human desire is shared by all men alike. But if all men gave free rein to their desires, the result would be impossible to endure, and the material goods of the whole world would be inadequate to satisfy them. Accordingly, the Ancient Kings acted to control them with ritual principles in order thereby to divide society into classes, creating therewith differences in status between the noble and base, disparities between the privileges of age and youth, and the division of the wise from the stupid, the able from the incapable. All of this caused men to perform the duties of their station in life and each to receive his due; only after this had been done was the amount and substance of the emolument paid by grain made to fit their respective stations. This indeed is the way to make the whole populace live together in harmony and unity. Accordingly, when a humane man occupies the highest position, farmers labor with all their energy to exhaust the potential of their fields, merchants scrutinize with keen eyes to get the utmost from their goods, the various artisans use their skills to the fullest in making utensils and wares, and the officials, from the knights and grand officers up to the feudal lords, all execute fully the functions of their offices with humanity, generosity, wisdom, and ability. This

²⁹ I think for Professor Fung Yiu-ming for pointing out the distinction between desires as basic needs and desires that are more than basic needs, and for his discussion of Xunzi's optimistic view of satisfying human basic needs.

may be called “perfect peace.” So though one may have as his emolument the whole world, he need not consider it excessive, and though one be only a gatekeeper, receptionist, guard, or nightwatchman, he need never think his salary too meager. Anciently it was said: “Unequal yet equivalent, bent yet obedient, not the same yet uniform.” This refers to the constant relationships of mankind.³⁰

夫貴爲天子，富有天下，是人情之所同欲也；然則從人之欲，則孰不能容，物不能贍也。故先王案爲之制禮義以分之，使有貴賤之等，長幼之差，知愚能不能之分，皆使人載其事而各得其宜。然後使穀祿多少厚薄之稱，是夫群居和一之道也。故仁人在上，則農以力盡田，賈以察盡財，百工以巧盡械器，士大夫以上，至於公侯，莫不以仁厚知能盡官職，夫是之謂至平。故或祿天下，而不自以爲多；或監門御旅，抱關擊柝，而不自以爲寡。故曰：斬而齊，枉而順，不同而一，夫是之謂人倫。³¹

To some extent whether equal distribution sacrifices the satisfaction of someone’s basic needs can only be determined in highly qualified social and economic conditions. Any simple response to this issue is inappropriate. Since the main theme of this thesis is Xunzi’s moral knowledge and the problem about equal distribution is more closely related to Xunzi’s political philosophy than his moral philosophy, this problem need not be discussed here in detail. On the other hand, even if we find a special pattern of equal distribution which does not bring about any abovementioned bad consequences, it does not weaken the significance of *li* in Xunzi’s philosophy because it can fulfill other important functions. Reverting to our

³⁰ Knoblock revised, pp. 194-5.

³¹ “Rong Ru Pian,” pp. 44-5.

topic, from the above quoted passage, it becomes clear that how *li* fulfills its distributive function. Firstly, the members of a society are classified into different social classes in accordance with *li*. The standards of classification in *li* include, at least, the age, the abilities and moral performance of a person. Secondly, *li* also prescribes what and how many resources and duties are given to the persons in different social classes.

Although Xunzi emphasizes the necessity of hierarchical social structure, this does not mean that he does not allow people to alter their own social status. In some passages, it can be seen that Xunzi seems to advocate meritocracy. He requires that “those without ability shall be without office”³² (無能不官)³³ and “[t]he worthy shall be honored, the able employed, and each shall be assigned to his appropriate position without oversight”³⁴ (尙賢使能，而等位不遺).³⁵ He thinks that the operation of a meritocratic society should be as follows:

In the case of worthy and able men, promote them without waiting for their turn to come up. In the case of inferior and incompetent men, dismiss them without hesitation...Although a man may be the descendant of kings, dukes, or high court ministers, if he cannot adhere to ritual principles, he should be ranked among the

³² Knoblock revised, p. 101.

³³ “Wang Zhi Pian,” p. 119.

³⁴ Watson revised, p. 44.

³⁵ “Wang Zhi Pian,” p. 119.

commoners. Although a man may be the descendant of commoners, if he has acquired learning, is upright in conduct, and can adhere to *li*, he should be promoted to the post of prime minister or high court official. When it comes to men of perverse words and theories, perverse undertakings and talents, or to people who are slippery or vagrant, they should be given tasks to do, taught what is right, and allowed a period of trial. Encourage them when rewards, discipline them with punishments, and if they settle down to their work, then look after them as subjects; but if not, cast them out. In the case of those who belong to the five incapacitated groups, (those who are dumb, deaf, crippled, missing an arm or leg, or dwarfed.) the government should gather them together, look after them, and give them whatever work they are able to do. Employ them, provide them with food and clothing, and take care to see that none are left out. If anyone is found acting or using his talents to work against the good of the time, condemn him to death without mercy. This is what is called the virtue of Heaven and the government of a true king.³⁶

賢能不待次而舉，罷不能不待須而廢……雖王公士大夫之子孫也，不能屬於禮義，則歸之庶人。雖庶人之子孫也，積文學，正身行，能屬於禮義，則歸之卿相士大夫。故姦言姦說姦事姦能，遁逃反側之民，職而教之，須而待之。勉之以慶賞，懲之以刑罰。安職則畜，不安職則棄。五疾，上收而養之，材而事之，官施而衣食之，兼覆無遺。才行反時者死無赦。夫是之謂天德，王者之政也。³⁷

Perhaps Xunzi's political thought is compatible with equality of opportunity.

This claim may be supported further because someone argues that the Pre-Qin thinkers may hold that all men are naturally equal.³⁸ However, whether Xunzi's political thought is compatible with equality of opportunity is a topic for another essay. Therefore, this issue is not discussed here.

³⁶ Watson, pp. 35-6.

³⁷ "Wang Zhi Pian," p. 115.

³⁸ Donald J. Munro, The Concept of Man in Early China (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1969), pp. 1-4.

Someone may argue that it is more effective to solve the conflict among people by eliminating their desires instead of establishing a complex social hierarchy and practice of *li*. Xunzi thinks, however, that this suggestion is untenable. Obviously, some very basic needs of human beings are impossible to eliminate without causing the death of people. People can neither eliminate nor satisfy all their desires. But they can be moderated.

The basic nature of man is that which he receives from Heaven. The emotions are the substance of the nature and the desires are the responses of the emotions. When what is desired is judged to be obtainable, it will be pursued. That is a necessary and inescapable part of our essential nature. When one has judged that his desires can be satisfied, it must then be the function of the intellect to guide the search for satisfaction. Even a lowly gatekeeper cannot keep from having desires, for they are the inseparable attributes of the basic nature. On the other hand, even the king cannot completely satisfy all his desires. But although one cannot completely satisfy all his desires, he can come close complete satisfaction, and although one cannot do away with all desires, he can moderate the search for satisfaction. That is to say, one cannot completely satisfy all his desires, but by seeking to do so he can come close to satisfying them. Conversely, one cannot rid himself of desire, and there will always be longings left unsatisfied; but one who ponders the matter can make an attempt to moderate the search for satisfaction. The *Dao* in its positive aspect can lead one close to the satisfaction of all desires and in its negative aspect can serve to moderate the search for satisfaction. In the respect, there is nothing in the world to compare to it.³⁹

性者，天之就也；情者，性之質也；欲者，情之應也。以所欲為可得而求之；情之所必不免也。以為可而道之，知所必出也。故雖為守門，欲不可去；性之具也。雖

³⁹ Knoblock revised, p. 136; Watson revised, pp. 155-6.

爲天子，欲不可盡。欲雖不可盡，可以近盡也；欲雖不可去，求可節也。所欲雖不可盡，求者猶近盡，欲雖不可去，所求不得，慮者欲節求也。道者，進則近盡，退則節求，天下莫之若也。⁴⁰

Xunzi believes that the moderation of human desires not only can eliminate conflicts among people, but also that everyone can satisfy his or her desires and the state can accumulate a huge amount of goods. In other words, *li* can facilitate production.⁴¹

Moderate the use of goods, let the people make a generous living, and be good at storing up the harvest surplus. Moderate the use of goods by means of ritual principles, and let the people make a generous living through the exercise of government.

Such moderation in the use of goods will cause overflowing surpluses and allow the people to make a generous living. If the people are allowed to make a generous living, they will become rich. If the people are rich, their fields will be fat because they are well cultivated. If the fields are fat and well cultivated, they will bear a harvest a hundred times over. When the upper classes take from the harvest as provided by law and the lower classes moderate their use of goods according to ritual principles, the surplus will pile up to veritable mounds and hills so that it will seem on occasion that it must be burned to destroy what there is no more room to store. How could a gentleman face the calamity of having no surplus?

Accordingly, if one knows to be moderate in the use of goods and to allow the people a generous living, he is certain to have a reputation for being humane, just, sage-like, and

⁴⁰ Xunzi (荀子), “Zheng Ming Pian” (正名篇), trans. Wang Zhonglin (王忠林 譯), Xinyi Xunzi Duben (新譯荀子讀本) Taipei: Sanmin Shuju (臺北市：三民書局), 2006, p. 380. Henceforth cited as “Zheng Ming Pian.”

⁴¹ Goldin claims that *li* has three faces: moral, political, and economic. I classify the political and economic functions of *li* as its social function. See, Paul Rakita Goldin, Ritual of the Way: The Philosophy of Xunzi (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1999), pp. 77-8, 81.

virtuous; moreover he will have an accumulation of riches as substantial as a mound or hill. This is due to no other cause than its being the natural product of moderation in the use of goods and allowing the people a generous living. If one does not know to be moderate in the use of goods and to allow the people a generous living, then the people will be poor. If the people are poor, the fields will produce meagerly and be overgrown with weeds. If the fields produce meagerly and have become overgrown with weeds, they will bear less than half the normal harvest. The upper classes, though fond of plundering and stealing the people's rightful goods, will find only meager quantities to take. If others act contrary to ritual requirements to moderate their use of goods, then they are sure to have a reputation for confiscating property out of utter avarice, and for all that they will have a harvest amounting to less than nothing in times of need and want.⁴²

足國之道，節用裕民，而善臧其餘。節用以禮，裕民以政。彼裕民故多餘；裕民則民富，民富則田肥以易，田肥以易則出實百倍。上以法取焉，而下以禮節用之，餘若丘山，不時焚燒，無所臧之；夫君子奚患乎無餘！故知節用裕民，則必有仁義聖良之名，而且有富厚丘山之積矣。此無他故焉，生於節用裕民也。不知節用裕民則民貧，民貧則田瘠以穢，田瘠以穢則出實不豐；上雖好取侵奪，猶將寡獲也。而或以無禮節用之，則必有貪利糾譎之名，而且有空虛窮乏之實矣。⁴³

The moderation of desire is achieved through the practice of *li*. However, moderation cannot be merely identified with curbing human desires. Xunzi holds that, on the one hand, the mere constraint or elimination of human desires cannot prevent social disorder. On the other hand, altering human desires by appropriate cultivation is an effective and long-lasting way to avoid social conflicts. And it is the practice of *li* that can transform human desires.

⁴² Knoblock, pp. 121-2.

⁴³ "Fu Guo Pian," p. 141.

Thus, the meaning of *li* is to nurture. The meat of pastured and grain-fed animals, rice and millet, blends and combinations of the five flavors, are what nurture the mouth. The fragrances of peppercorns and orchids, aromas and bouquets, are what nurture the nose. Carved and polished [jade], incised and inlaid [metals], and [fabrics] embroidered with the white and black axe emblem, the azure and black notched-stripe, the azure and crimson stripe, the white and chime-stone, are what nurture the eye. Bells and drums, flutes and crimson-blazon, lutes and zithers, reed pipes and reed organs, are what nurture the ear. Spacious rooms, secluded chambers, mats of plaited rushes, couches and bed mats, armrests and cushions, are what nurture the body. Thus, *li* is what nurture.⁴⁴

故禮者養也；芻豢稻粱，五味調香，所以養口也；椒蘭芬苾，所以養鼻也；雕琢刻鏤黼黻文章，所以養目也；鐘鼓管磬琴瑟笙簧，所以養耳也；疏房檉貌越席床第几筵，所以養體也。故禮者養也。⁴⁵

Through the practice of *li*, one can transform his or her desires by cultivating new desires to override the existing ones. Moreover, these cultivated desires become the main motivation of human actions. In other words, *li* has the function of transforming human desires.

2.2.2 The function of *li*: Transformation

Following the transformative function of *li*, people in different social roles and classes are cultivated to desire things which correspond to and are appropriate to

⁴⁴ Knoblock revised, p. 55.

⁴⁵ “Li Lun Pian,” p. 311.

their status. Xunzi illustrates this by suggesting what things a king should desire and explaining why he should desire them.

When the morally superior person, *junzi*, has been nurtured by these things, he will also fond of distinctions. What is meant by “distinctions”? I say that these refer to the gradations of rank according to nobility or baseness, disparities between the privileges of old and young, and modes of identification to match these with poverty or wealth, insignificance or importance. Thus, the king has the Great Chariot and rush mats to care for his comfort. On either side of the chariot fragrant marsh angelica is placed to care for his sense of smell. In front of him there is the inlaid yoke shaft to nurture his sense of sight. There are the harmonious sounds of the tinkling bells on the horse’s trappings; the chariot moves along in time with the “Martial” and “Imitation” music; and the horses gallop in time with the “Succession” and “Guarding” music- all in order to nurture his sense of hearing. There is the dragon banner with nine scallops to nurture a sense of sacredness about him. There are the recumbent rhinoceros, the crouching tiger, back harnesses with scaly dragon patterns, the silken carriage coverings, and yoke-ends with dragons to nurture his majestic authority. Thus, the horse for the Grand Chariot must be thoroughly reliable and perfectly trained before it is harnessed, to nurture a sense of security about hum.⁴⁶

君子既得其養，又好其別。曷謂別？曰：貴賤有等，長幼有差，貧富輕重皆有稱者也。故天子大路越席，所以養體也；側載翠芷，所以養鼻也；前有錯衡，所以養目也；和轡之聲，步中武象，趨中韶護，所以養耳也；龍旗九旂，所以養信也；寢兕持虎，蛟韉，絲末，彌龍，所以養威也；故大路之馬必倍至，教順，然後乘之，所以養安也。⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Knoblock revised, p. 56.

⁴⁷ “Li Lun Pian,” p. 311.

The king is cultivated to desire luxuries because doing so can distinguish him from others. This distinction can nurture a respect for authority. This can help the king to govern. Thus, what one is cultivated to desire should be appropriate to one's social status and should help people fulfill their social functions. Moreover, *li* is also used to control our passions and emotions. Extreme emotions of joy or grief need in particular to be controlled because they may drive people to act radically and to harm themselves or others.⁴⁸

Rites trim what is too long, stretch out what is too short, eliminate excess, remedy deficiency, and extend cultivated forms that express love and respect so that they increase and complete the beauty of conduct according to one's duty. Thus, elegant adornment and gross ugliness, the sounds of music and the sobs of crying, contented happiness and grief-stricken distress are all opposites, yet rites use them all, substituting and changing them as the occasion requires.

Elegant adornment, music, and happiness are what sustain tranquillity and serve auspicious occasions. Gross ugliness, weeping, and sorrow are what sustain anxiety and serve inauspicious occasions. Hence, their utilization of elegant adornment does not go so far as to be sensuous or seductive, nor gross ugliness so far as to produce emaciation or self-neglect. Their use of music and happiness does not go so far as to be wayward and abandoned or indolent and rude, nor do weeping and sorrow go so far as to produce despondency or injury to life. Such is the middle course of ritual.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ A. C. Graham, Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989), p. 258.

⁴⁹ Knoblock, p. 65.

禮者，斷長續短，損有餘，益不足，達愛敬之文，而滋成行義之美者也。故文飾羸惡，聲樂哭泣，恬愉憂戚，是反也；然而禮兼而用之，時舉而代御。故文飾聲樂恬愉，所以持平奉吉也；羸哀哭泣憂戚，所以持險奉凶也。故其立文飾也，不至於窳冶；其立羸惡也，不至於瘠弃；其立聲樂恬愉也，不至於流淫惰慢；其立哭泣憂戚也，不至於隘懼傷生，是禮之中流也。⁵⁰

However, the question that emerges here is that of understanding how human desires can be transformed through the practice of *li*.

2.2.3 *xing*

The answer to the question of how the practice of *li* transforms human desires is related to Xunzi's conception of human nature, or *xing* (性). Although Xunzi himself says that human nature is bad, or *e* (惡), he never thinks that human beings have any innate tendency to enjoy damaging, destroying, or hurting each other.⁵¹ To clarify what he means in saying that human nature is bad, we must look to what he has to say about human nature. He says: "What characterizes a man from birth is called his

⁵⁰ "Li Lun Pian," pp. 316-7.

⁵¹ Graham says that what Xunzi means in speaking of that human is evil is not as same as the Christian notion of Original Sin in which people are incapable of transforming their evil nature or salvaging themselves from depravity by their own effort. See, A. C. Graham, Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989), p. 248.

‘nature’⁵² (生之所以然者謂之性).” It is the definition of *xing*. As for its content, he says:

To desire food when hungry, to desire warmth when cold, to desire rest when tired, and to be fond of what is beneficial and to hate what is harmful—these characteristics man is born possessing, and he does not have to wait to develop them. They are identical in the case of a Yu and in that of a Jie.⁵³

飢而欲食，寒而欲煖，勞而欲息，好利而惡害，是人之所生而有也，是無待而然者也，是禹桀之所同也。⁵⁴

Actually, Xunzi thinks that human nature at least consists in human inborn basic instincts and desires. It is implausible to say that these instincts and desires are evil. Thus, it is reasonable to believe that when Xunzi says human nature is bad, he does not mean that human innate desires are intrinsically bad or evil.⁵⁵ In section 2.2.1, some of Xunzi’s words were cited to show that when he says human nature is evil, this could simply mean that bad consequences are caused by human beings when they pursue the satisfaction of desires in an uncontrolled manner. It is more

⁵² Knoblock, p. 127.

⁵³, Knoblock, p. 206.

⁵⁴ Xunzi (荀子), “Fei Xiang Pian” (非相篇), trans. Wang Zhonglin (王忠林 譯), *Xinyi Xunzi Duben* (新譯荀子讀本) Taipei: Sanmin Shuju (臺北市：三民書局), 2006, p. 56. Henceforth: “Fei Xiang Pian.”

⁵⁵ Munro and Ivanhoe defend this account of Xunzi’s conception of evil human nature. See, Donald J. Munro, “A Villain in the Xunzi,” in *Chinese Language, Thought, and Culture: Nivison and His Critics*, ed. Philip J. Ivanhoe (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1996), p. 199; and Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), p. 32.

reasonable to think that human nature is neutral in Xunzi's philosophy.⁵⁶ Perhaps he says human nature is bad because he wants to emphasize that, under some conditions, such as the scarcity of resources, the combination of human desires would give rise to bad consequences.

Furthermore, Xunzi's conception of *xing* also includes some basic human emotions.

Love and hate, delight and anger, sorrow and joy, are stored within—these are described as ‘the emotions given us by nature.’⁵⁷

好惡喜怒哀樂臧焉，夫是之謂天情。⁵⁸

For Xunzi, human nature consists of basic instincts, inborn appetitive and sensory desires, and inborn abilities of responding to external stimulation.⁵⁹ This explains why he usually uses people's abilities to receive and respond to sensory

⁵⁶ Wu Rujun (吳汝鈞), Rujia Zhexue (儒家哲學) Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu Yinshuguan (臺北市：臺灣商務印書館), 1995, p. 56. And Cai Renhou (蔡仁厚), Kong Meng Xun Zhexue (孔孟荀哲學) Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju (臺北市：臺灣學生書局), 1984, p. 387.

⁵⁷ Knoblock, p. 16.

⁵⁸ Xunzi (荀子), “Tian Lun Pian” (天論篇), trans. Wang Zhonglin (王忠林 譯), Xinyi Xunzi Duben (新譯荀子讀本) Taipei: Sanmin Shuju (臺北市：三民書局), 2006, p. 275. Henceforth: “Tian Lun Pian.”

⁵⁹ Xu Fuquan (徐復觀) also holds that the Xunzi's conception of human nature consists of human basic desires, such as desiring food when one feels hunger, and the abilities of human sensory organs, for instance, eyes for seeing. Furthermore, Xu claims that human nature is quite plastic in Xunzi's philosophy. Under this understanding of Xunzi's theory of human nature, it is more plausible to say that human nature is neutral in Xunzi's thought because human basic desires are neither good nor evil. See, Xu Fuquan (徐復觀), Zhongguo Ren Xing Lun Shi: Xian Qin Pian (中國人性論史：先秦篇) Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian Shudian (上海：上海三聯書店), 2001, pp. 201, 206.

stimuli to illustrate his concept of human nature. This kind of inborn ability is well-developed after birth. Thus, Xunzi claims that human nature cannot be further developed and acquired by learning and effort⁶⁰ (不可學，不可事).⁶¹

2.2.4 *wei*

Being contrary to *xing*, *wei* (偽),⁶² or constitutive effort, refers to the things which can be acquired by learning or by human effort. One example of constitutive effort is *li*. In fact, *li* is created by the sage. He says:

As a general rule, “inborn nature” embraces what is spontaneous from Nature, what cannot be learned, and what required no application to master. Ritual principles are creations of the sages. They are things that people must study to be able to follow them and to which they must apply themselves before they can fulfill their precepts. What cannot be gained by learning and cannot be mastered by application yet is found in man is properly termed “inborn nature.” What must be learned before a man can do it and what he must apply himself to before he can master it yet is found in man is properly called “constitutive effort.” This is precisely the distinction between “inborn nature” and “constitutive effort.

Now, it belongs to the inborn nature of man that the eye is able to see and the ear to hear. The ability to see clearly cannot be separated from the eye, nor the ability to hear acutely

⁶⁰ Watson revised, p. 162.

⁶¹ “Xing E Pian,” p. 396.

⁶² There are several English translations of “*wei*”, for instance, “human artifice”, “constitutive effort”, “purposive action”, and “deliberate effort”. Since *wei* consists of deliberation and cumulative effort, and it can refer to the human capacities being developed after exercising them continuously, “constitutive effort” is the more appropriate translation.

from the ear. It is quite impossible to learn to be clear-sighted or keen of hearing.⁶³

凡性者，天之就也，不可學，不可事。禮義者，聖人之所生也，人之所學而能，所事而成者也。不可學，不可事，而在人者，謂之性；可學而能，可事而成之在人者，謂之偽。是性偽之分也。今人之性，目可以見，耳可以聽；夫可以見之明不離目，可以聽之聰不離耳，目明而耳聰，不可學明矣。⁶⁴

How does the sage create *li* through constitutive effort? Xunzi answers that

The sage accumulates his thoughts and ideas. He masters through practice the skills of his constitutive effort and the principles involved therein in order to produce ritual principles and to develop laws and standards. This being the case, ritual principles, laws and standards, are the creation of the constitutive effort of the sage and not the product of anything inherent in his inborn nature.⁶⁵

聖人積思慮，習偽故，以生禮義而起法度，然則禮義法度者，是生於聖人之偽，非故生於人之性也。⁶⁶

Through deliberation, *lü* (慮) and cumulative effort, *ji* (積), the sage is able to establish *li*.⁶⁷ These two factors also constitute the conception of constitutive effort.

However, it is still unclear how *wei* operates. Xunzi further explains:

What characterizes a man from birth is called his “nature” What is produced out of the

⁶³ Knoblock revised, p. 152.

⁶⁴ “Xing E Pian,” p. 396.

⁶⁵ Knoblock revised, p. 153.

⁶⁶ “Xing E Pian,” p. 397.

⁶⁷ Chong Kim-chong, Early Confucian Ethics: Concepts and Arguments (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2007), p. 100.

harmony of inborn nature, out of the sensibilities of the organ tallying as the sense respond to stimuli, and what from birth is effortless and spontaneous are called “nature.” The feelings of liking and disliking, of delight and anger, and of sorrow and joy that are inborn in our nature are called “emotions.” The emotions being so paired, the mind’s choosing between them is called “thinking.” The mind’s thinking something and the natural abilities’ acting on it is called “constitutive effort.” When thoughts are accumulated and one’s natural abilities have been practiced so that something is completed, it is called “constitutive effort... The capacity of knowing which is within man is called “knowing.” What man’s knowing is corresponding with the facts is called “knowing.” The capacity of being able that is within man is called “capacity”. Capacity corresponding with the requirements of a situation is called “capacity.”⁶⁸

生之所以然者謂之性。性之和所生，精合感應，不事而自然謂之性。性之好惡喜怒哀樂謂之情。情然而心爲之擇謂之慮。心慮而能爲之動謂之爲。慮積焉，能習焉，而後成謂之爲。……所以知之在人者謂之知。知有所合謂之智。智所以能之在人者謂之能。能有所合謂之能。⁶⁹

In the above passage, we can discover two senses of constitutive effort.

The first sense of *wei* refers to the capacity of the heart-mind, *xin* (心), to respond to external stimuli. The second sense of *wei* refers to a learned ability. After numerous exercises of deliberation and adjudication and participating in learning and in the practice of *li*, one develops some virtues and habits of acting morally. This is the second sense of *wei*.⁷⁰ However, in describing the first sense of *wei*, Xunzi seems to imply that the function of heart-mind to respond external stimuli is a part of

⁶⁸ Knoblock revised, p. 127.

⁶⁹ “Zheng Ming Pian,” p. 374.

⁷⁰ Cai Renhou (蔡仁厚), *Kong Meng Xun Zhexue* (孔孟荀哲學) Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju (臺北市：臺灣學生書局), 1984, p. 393.

human inborn nature.⁷¹ If that is true, Xunzi's concept of *xing* is not sharply distinct from his concept of *wei* since the first sense of *wei* is one of the components of human nature. Some evidence can be found in Xunzi's works to support it. Firstly, in the above cited passage, there are also two senses of "knowing" and "capacity". The first sense of these two terms refers to our natural capacities, while the second sense is about the actualization of these capacities or the performance issued from these actualized capacities. Xunzi emphasizes that the first sense of "knowing" and "capacity" is human natural capacity by claiming that these two capacities are "within man" (在人者).⁷² From the whole cited passage, the term "*wei*" is parallel to "knowing" and "capacity" and all of them have two senses. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that the first sense of "*wei*" is as same as the first sense of "knowing" and "capacity" and they are all the components of human nature. Furthermore, he explicitly states that these capacities and the basic human dispositions are common in people in "Of Honor and Disgrace" (榮辱篇).

In natural talent, inborn nature, knowing, and capacity, the morally superior man and the petty man are the same. In cherishing honor and detesting disgrace, in loving benefit and

⁷¹ I thank for Prof Fung Yiu-ming for informing me that the first sense of *wei* is part of human inborn nature.

⁷² See footnotes 68 and 69.

hating harm, the morally superior man and the petty man are the same.⁷³

材性知能，君子小人一也；好榮惡辱，好利惡害，是君子小人之所同也[。]⁷⁴

Thus, these capacities and basic human dispositions are the components of human nature. Secondly, in Xunzi's text it can be discovered that the term "*xing*" not merely refers to human basic needs or natural dispositions and instincts. For example, in "Dispelling Blindness" (解蔽篇), he says that, "man is born with capacity of knowing...the heart-mind is born with the capacity of knowing⁷⁵ (人生而有知……心生而有知)."⁷⁶ Thus, *xing* not only includes human basic needs, dispositions and instincts, but also consists of some inborn capacities.

In short, the distinction between *xing* and *wei* is obscure. Although *xing* is "a biological concept in that it refers to what all human beings are born with," it does not merely include human basic sensory and appetitive desires.⁷⁷ Some capacities which can be developed by human effort are also held to be constituents of human nature. *Wei* is not only what is caused by continuous learning and practice. It also

⁷³ Knoblock revised, p. 190.

⁷⁴ "Rong Ru Pian," p. 41.

⁷⁵ Watson revised, pp. 131-2.

⁷⁶ Xunzi (荀子), "Jie Bi Pian" (解蔽篇), trans. Wang Zhonglin (王忠林 譯), *Xinyi Xunzi Duben* (新譯荀子讀本) Taipei: Sanmin Shuju (臺北市：三民書局), 2006, p. 354.

⁷⁷ Chong Kim-chong, "Xunzi and the Essentialist Mode of Thinking on Human Nature," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 35:1 (2008): 71.

refers to the human inborn capacity to respond to external stimuli. Thus, *wei*, as a human capacity, is part of *xing*. To avoid confusion, in this thesis *xing* only refers to basic human needs and instincts. Other human, non-well-developed inborn capacities are named *qing* (情). This notion is crucial to our understanding of the account of the transformation of human desires through the practice of *li*. It will be discussed in the next section.

2.2.5 Transformation of *xing*

Before discussing how *xing* can be transformed through the practice of *li*, let us read another account of why moral rules are created:

In antiquity the sage kings took man's nature to be evil, to be inclined to prejudice and prone to error, to be perverse and rebellious, and not to be upright or orderly. For this reason they invented ritual principles and precepts of moral duty. They instituted the regulations that are contained in laws and standards. Through these actions they intended to "straighten out" and develop man's sensory and emotional nature and to set it aright. They sought to tame and transform his sensory and emotional nature and to guide it with the Way. They caused both his sensory and emotional nature to develop with good order and be consistent with the true Way.⁷⁸

古者聖王以人之性惡，以爲偏險而不正，悖亂而不治；是以爲之起禮義，制法度，

⁷⁸ Knoblock translates the term *qing xing* (情性) as "inborn essential nature". I prefer to adopt Chong's suggestion to translate this term as "senory and emotional nature". See Knoblock, pp. 151-2, and Chong Kim-chong, Early Confucian Ethics: Concepts and Arguments (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2007), p. 156, endnote 19.

以矯飾人之情性而正之，以擾化人之情性而導之也，始皆出於治，合於道者也。⁷⁹

It becomes clear that *li* is created for regulating our sensory and emotional nature. For Xunzi, human inborn nature has to be controlled, since otherwise it can cause bad consequences. Now, the problem is whether sensory and emotional nature can be transformed. Xunzi believes that it can be altered. He says,

“Inborn nature” is what it is impossible for me to create but which I can nonetheless transform.⁸⁰

性也者，吾所不能爲也，然而可化也。⁸¹

and,

Inborn nature is the root and beginning, the raw material and original constitution. Constitutive effort is responsible for what is adorned, ordered, developed, and flourishing. If there were no inborn nature, there would be nothing for constitutive effort to improve; if there were no constitutive effort, then inborn nature could not refine itself. Only when inborn nature and constitutive effort combine does a true sage emerge and perform the task of unifying the world.⁸²

⁷⁹ “Xing E Pian,” p. 395.

⁸⁰ Knoblock, p. 81

⁸¹ Xunzi (荀子), “Ru Xiao Pian” (儒效篇), trans. Wang Zhonglin (王忠林 譯), Xinyi Xunzi Duben (新譯荀子讀本) Taipei: Sanmin Shuju (臺北市：三民書局), 2006, p. 97.

⁸² Knoblock revised, p. 66; Watson revised, p. 106.

性者，本始材朴也；偽者，文理隆盛也。無性則偽之無所加；無偽則性不能自美。性偽合，然後成聖人之名一，天下之功於是就也。⁸³

These two quoted passages explicitly indicate that human *xing* not only can be transformed, but also is necessary for realizing any constitutive effort. However, in section, 2.2.4, we noted that *xing* is inborn and well-developed. People cannot develop it further. For example, we must desire food when we feel hungry. It is unintelligible to propose that we must nurture or develop an ability to desire food when we are hungry: is that not what it means to be hungry in the first place? Xunzi seems to make incompatible claims about the nature of *xing* and the object of *wei*.

This apparent contradiction can be explained in the following way. Firstly, even though we cannot alter these inborn sensory and appetitive desires and basic emotions, they can be satisfied in a cultured, or elegant way. This is what Cua calls the ennobling function of *li*.⁸⁴ In this sense, *wei* refers to the cultivated desires for satisfying those inborn desires and the desires to express the primitive emotions in a refined way. Secondly, the ennobling function can be successful because there are some other inborn wants and capacities which go beyond those basic sensory and

⁸³ “Li Lun Pian,” p. 318.

⁸⁴ Antonio S. Cua, “The Concept of *Li* in Confucian Moral Theory,” in Understanding the Chinese Mind: the Philosophical Roots, ed. Robert E. Allinson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 218-9.

appetitive desires and feelings for refinement.⁸⁵ Xunzi names these capacities and wants *qing* (情). It should be noted that in some contexts, *qing* refers to emotions or feelings. We will discuss some of these capacities and wants later.

If there exist such capacities and wants, it might be possible that human beings also want what is good, and more specifically, what is morally good. Graham thinks that Xunzi never excludes the existence of a desire for moral goodness in the human mind.⁸⁶

Every man who desires to do good does so precisely because his nature is evil. A man whose accomplishments are meager longs for greatness; an ugly man longs for beauty; a man in cramped quarters longs for spaciousness; a poor man longs for wealth; a humble man longs for eminence. Whatever a man lacks in himself he will seek outside. But if a man is already rich, he will not long for wealth, and if he is already eminent, he will not long for greater power. What a man already possesses in himself he will not bother to look for outside. From this we can see that men desire to do good precisely because their nature is evil.⁸⁷

凡人之欲爲善者，爲性惡也。夫薄願厚，惡願美，狹願廣，貧願富，賤願貴，苟無之中者，必求於外。故富而不願財，貴而不願執，苟有之中者，必不及於外。用此觀之，人之欲爲善者，爲性惡也。⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Chong Kim-chong, "Xunzi and the Essentialist Mode of Thinking on Human Nature," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 35:1 (2008): 71.

⁸⁶ A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989), p. 248.

⁸⁷ Watson, pp. 165-6.

⁸⁸ "Xing E Pian," p. 398.

In the above passage we have evidence to support the claim that although Xunzi holds that human nature is self-interested, it is still possible that people act morally and delight in performing morally good actions. David B. Wong suggests that, in this passage Xunzi tries to show that human beings with their original self-interested, or morally neutral nature, could transform into moral beings by pursuing what they lack.⁸⁹ Thus, human nature can be transformed by *li* through other human inborn capacities and wants.

2.2.6 The distinction between *ke* and *neng*

Human capacities and wants seem to provide the way not only for transforming *xing*, but also means for people to become sages. Xunzi believes that it is possible for anyone to be a sage. By continuously learning the rationale of *li* and morality and participating in the practice of *li*, we can cultivate the sense of morality.⁹⁰ As Xunzi says:

I say that in general what made the sage king Yu a Yu was the fact that he practiced

⁸⁹ David B. Wong, "Xunzi on Moral Motivation," in Chinese Language, Thought, and Culture: Nivison and His Critics, ed. Philip J. Ivanhoe, (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1996), p. 209.

⁹⁰ A. C. Graham, Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989), p. 248.

benevolence and righteousness and abided by the proper rules and standards. Since this is so, then benevolence, righteousness, and proper rules and standards must be based upon rational principles which we can know and which we are capable of putting into practice. That being so, it is clear that any ordinary man can become a Yu, since every man has the essential faculties needed to understand the substance of benevolence, righteousness, the proper rules and standards and the potential ability to put them into practice. Therefore it is clear that he can become a Yu.⁹¹

凡禹之所以爲禹者，以其爲仁義法正也。然則仁義法正有可知可能之理，然而塗之人也，皆有可以知仁義法正之質，皆有可以能仁義法正之具；然則其可以爲禹明矣。
92

Although Xunzi claims that it is possible for anyone to be a sage because we can know and act in accordance with moral sense, in fact, not all people actually are sages. To defend his claim, he draws a distinction between “capacity”, or *ke* (可), and “ability”, or *neng* (能).⁹³

Someone asks: “How is it possible for the sage to reach this high state through his accumulated effort, but the rest of mankind cannot?” I say that although it is possible for them to do so, they cannot be induced to do so. Thus, although the petty man is capable of becoming a morally superior man, he is unwilling to do so; although the morally superior person could become a petty man, he is unwilling to do so. It has never been impossible for the petty man and the morally superior person to become other. The fact they have never done so, although it is possible for them to do so, is because they cannot be induced to do so. Thus, although it is true that it is possible for the ordinary man to become a Yu,

⁹¹ Knoblock revised, p. 158; Watson revised, p. 170.

⁹² “Xing E Pian,” p. 400.

⁹³ A. C. Graham, Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China, (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989), p. 249. Chong Kim-chong says that Xunzi criticizes Mencius for confusing these two conceptions. See, Chong Kim-chong, Early Confucian Ethics: Concepts and Arguments (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2007), pp. 69-71.

that the ordinary man has the real capacity to become a Yu is not necessarily so. Even though one is unable to become a Yu, this does not contradict the possibility of his becoming a Yu.

It is possible for a man to travel by foot across the width of the whole world, yet there has never been a case where anyone was able to travel across the world by foot. So, too, although it has never been impossible for the artisan, carpenter, farmer, or trader to practice each other's business, they have never been able to do so. If we consider the implications of these facts, we see that something's being possible does not guarantee having the ability to do it. Even though one is unable to do something, this does not contradict the possibility of doing it. This being the case, that something is possible or impossible is entirely dissimilar from having or not having the ability to do it. It is evident that it has never been impossible for the one to become the other.⁹⁴

曰：「聖可積而致，然而皆不可積，何也？」曰：可以而不可使也。故小人可以為君子，而不肯為君子；君子可以為小人，而不肯為小人。小人君子者，未嘗不可以相為也；然而不相為者，可以而不可使也。故塗之人可以為禹，則然；塗之人能為禹，未必然也。雖不能為禹，無害可以為禹。足可以徧行天下，然而未嘗有徧行天下者也。夫工匠農賈，未嘗不可以相為事也，然而未嘗能相為事也。用此觀之，然則可以為，未必能也；雖不能，無害可以為。然則能不能之與不可，其不同遠矣，其不可以相為明矣。⁹⁵

For Xunzi, people not only have the capacity to acquire knowledge of morality and ritual, but they also have the capacity to participate in moral and ritual practice.

In other words, everyone can be a sage in the sense that everyone has these capacities.

However, these capacities are not well-developed already. Without developing them,

⁹⁴ Knoblock uses “gentleman” to translate *junzi*, and “the man in the street” is translated as “*tu zhi ren*” (塗之人). I prefer “morally superior man” and “ordinary man” respectively. See Knoblock, pp. 159-60.

⁹⁵ “Xing E Pian,” p. 401.

one cannot cultivate a sense of morality and cannot be a sage. There are several factors, such as a depraved environment, lack of guidance and influence of teachers and friends having morally good characters, that can prevent one from developing these capacities. Moreover, Xunzi realizes that people may have no will to nurture their capacities and admits that in some cases the capacity is inadequate to the development of some virtues.⁹⁶ However, being unable to develop virtues or unable to be a sage does not imply that one has no corresponding capacities. For Xunzi, “capacity” and “ability” are different things.⁹⁷ Finally, these capacities are not moral capacities. Since Xunzi denies that human beings has some inborn organic moral structure which is the source of our moral sense and moral motivation, these capacities do not have any substantive moral content. In the following section, I will focus on the capacities related to human emotion.

2.2.7 *li* and emotion

At the beginning of the section 2.2.3, it was mentioned that *li* can cultivate human desires and emotions. In this section, how *li* transforms human emotions will

⁹⁶ Chong Kim-chong, Early Confucian Ethics: Concepts and Arguments (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2007), p. 73.

⁹⁷ Chong says that there is a logical gap between “capacity” and “ability”. See Chong Kim-chong, Early Confucian Ethics: Concepts and Arguments (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2007), pp. 71-2.

be discussed. Xunzi thinks that human beings have some emotions which go beyond their inborn nature. One of them is the love of its own kind. He says: “nothing that possesses consciousness fails to love its own kind...since no creature has greater consciousness than man, people would have the utmost feelings for their deceased parents⁹⁸ (有知之屬莫不愛其類……故有血氣之屬莫知於人；故人之於其親也，至死無窮).”⁹⁹

Following these emotions of remembrance and longing for the dead, Xunzi explains why the mourning period for the death of a parent is three years. During the first three years after the death of parents, he thinks, people’s “pain of grief is most intense”¹⁰⁰ (所以爲至痛極也).¹⁰¹ The emotion of grief has to be expressed, otherwise one’s emotions of remembrance and longing for the dead will be frustrated and unfulfilled.¹⁰² Actually, sacrificial rite is created for expressing our emotions of remembrance and longing for the dead¹⁰³ (祭者，志意思慕之情也).¹⁰⁴ Through rite,

⁹⁸ This sentence is adapted from both Chong’s and Watson’s translations. See, Chong Kim-chong, *Early Confucian Ethics: Concepts and Arguments* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2007), p. 107; Watson, p. 110.

⁹⁹ “Li Lun Pian,” pp. 319-20.

¹⁰⁰ Watson, p. 109.

¹⁰¹ “Li Lun Pian,” p. 319.

¹⁰² Watson, p. 113.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ “Li Lun Pian,” p. 321.

we can express “the highest degree of loyalty, love and reverence”¹⁰⁵ (忠信愛敬之至矣).¹⁰⁶

In addition to the abovementioned emotions, human beings have other profound feelings:

Ritual has three roots. Heaven and Earth are the root of life. Forebears are the root of kinship. Lords and teachers are the root of order. Were there no Heaven and no Earth, how could there be life? Were there no forebears, how could there be issue? Were there no lords and no teachers, how could there be order? Were even one of these three lost, there would be no peace and security for man. Thus, rituals serve Heaven above and Earth below, pay honor to one’s forebears, and exalt rulers and teachers, for these are the three roots of ritual.¹⁰⁷

禮有三本：天地者，生之本也；先祖者，類之本也；君師者，治之本也。無天地，惡生？無先祖，惡出？無君師，惡治？三者偏亡焉無安人。故禮上事天，下事地，尊先祖而隆君師。是禮之三本也。¹⁰⁸

Ji tian (祭天), sacrificial ceremony of Heaven, and *ji zu* (祭祖), sacrificial ceremony for the ancestors, are not used for influencing any supernatural power to protect or to help people. According to Xunzi, the aim of performing these

¹⁰⁵ Watson, p. 113.

¹⁰⁶ “Li Lun Pian,” p. 322.

¹⁰⁷ Knoblock revised, p. 58.

¹⁰⁸ “Li Lun Pian,” p. 312.

ceremonies is to appreciate the works of nature and our ancestors. Nature produces things for our use. We and our ancestors are produced by nature too. Our life is given to us by our ancestors. Lords and teachers establish the rules to govern and maintain the society in which we live. Thus, the sacrificial ceremony in the honor of Heaven and the ancestors can develop people's sense of appreciation and reciprocity and provide an appropriate way to express these feelings. In other words, one of the key functions of ritual is to provide an appropriate way to express people's yearning, appreciation and reciprocity. Xunzi thinks that virtue can be developed through the cultivation of the sense of reverence and reciprocity in the sacrificial ceremony in the honor of Heaven and the ancestors. He says: "To honor the origins is the basis of virtue¹⁰⁹ (貴始得之本也)."¹¹⁰

Through the practice of *li*, Xunzi thinks, the individual characteristics of people can be molded. This process includes cultivation and refinement. Transformation through the practice of *li* finally aims at the balance between the expression of emotion and ritual form.

All rites begin coarseness, are brought to fulfillment with form, and end with pleasure and

¹⁰⁹ Watson revised, p. 95.

¹¹⁰ "Li Lun Pian," p. 312.

beauty. Rites reach their highest perfection when both emotion and form are fully realized. In rites of the next order, emotions and form in turn prevail. In the lowest order of rites, all reverts to emotion through returning to the conditions of Primordial Unity.¹¹¹

凡禮，始乎稅，成乎文，終乎悅校。故至備，情文俱盡；其次，情文代勝；其下復情以歸大一也。¹¹²

One who always strikes the balance between ritual form and emotion is a sage.

The maintenance of the balance between form and emotion is a complex issue.

Whether a form of expression is appropriate depends on the occasion, on practical considerations, and on aesthetic needs.¹¹³ In other words, the realization of the balance of form and emotion requires one to consider all relevant factors. This is the characteristic of the sage. This point will be further discussed later.

In short, the above emotions and feelings, for instance, the love of one's own kind, remembrance and longing for the dead parent, a sense of reverence and reciprocity, are the raw materials in human nature which *li* can work upon in order to shape human beings to love virtue and to feel delight in participating in the practice of *li*.¹¹⁴ A balance between emotion and ritual form is the ideal form of *li*. Its

¹¹¹ Knoblock, p. 60.

¹¹² "Li Lun Pian," p. 313.

¹¹³ Chong Kim-chong, Early Confucian Ethics: Concepts and Arguments (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2007), pp. 114-5.

¹¹⁴ David B. Wong, "Xunzi on Moral Motivation," in Chinese Language, Thought, and Culture: Nivison and His Critics, ed. Philip J. Ivanhoe, (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1996), p. 217.

realization requires that people put a lot of effort into the practice *li* and do so for a long time.

Before going on to the next section, let us summarize the discussion of Xunzi's conception of *li*. The delimiting function of *li* prevents social disorder by means of limiting the individual pursuit of self-interest.¹¹⁵ This is, however, not the only function of ritual. It also provides "conditions or opportunities for satisfaction of desires within the prescribed limits of action."¹¹⁶ This supportive function of ritual is performed by redirecting the course of individual self-serving activities.¹¹⁷ After this redirection, our desires can be satisfied without being suppressed by the scarcity of resources.

Finally, *li* can refine our ways of satisfying desires. For example, a desire for food is natural, but the manner of satisfying this desire could be elegant when we satisfy it in the form of *li*. To some extent, *li* transforms our desires. After the transformation, what we desire is not merely the satisfaction of basic needs, but an elegant way of satisfying them.¹¹⁸ If *li* contains some moral considerations,

¹¹⁵ Antonio S. Cua, "Ethical Uses of the Past," in Antonio S. Cua, Human Nature, Ritual, and History: Studies in Xunzi and Chinese Philosophy. Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy. Vol. 43 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), p. 165.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 166.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Antonio S. Cua, "The Concept of *Li* in Confucian Moral Theory," in Understanding the Chinese Mind: the Philosophical Roots, ed. Robert E. Allinson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.

following it can transform our feelings and desires and lead to the development of virtues. In Xunzi's moral philosophy, the establishment of *li* is based on several moral considerations: the importance of maintaining social order, developing one's sense of righteousness and benevolence, and providing a way to achieve the Confucian ultimate goal of life: being a sage. Thus, through the ennobling function of *li*, a person can transform his or her desires and emotions and develop the virtues which are essential for being a sage.¹¹⁹

2.2.8 *Xue*

In this section, learning, or *xue* (學) will be discussed. Learning is essential to the moral transformation. The following passage shows the content and purpose of learning:

Where should learning begin and where should it end? I say: Its proper method is to start with the recitation of the Classics and end with the reading of the ritual texts. Its real purpose is first to learn to be a scholar and in the end to learn to be a sage. ... Truly The Book of Documents contain the record of governmental affairs. The Odes set the correct standards to which pronunciations should adhere. The Rituals contain the model for the primary social distinctions and the categories used by analogical extension for the guiding rules and ordering norms of behavior. Accordingly, when learning has been perfected in

218-9.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

the rituals, it has come to its terminus. Surely this may be called the culmination of the *Dao* and its Power. The reverence and refinement of The Rituals, the concord and harmony of The Music, the breadth of The Odes and The Documents, the subtlety of The Spring and Autumn Annals—these encompass all that is between Heaven and Earth.¹²⁰

學惡乎始？惡乎終？曰：其數則始乎誦經，終乎讀禮；其義則始乎爲士，終乎爲聖人。……故《書》者，政事之紀也；《詩》者，中聲之所止也；禮者，法之大分，類之綱紀也。故學至乎禮而止矣。夫是之謂道德之極。禮之敬文也，樂之中和也，《詩》《書》之博也，《春秋》之微也，在天地之間者畢矣。¹²¹

What Xunzi asks people to learn is the traditional classics of Confucianism. *Li* is learnt in the end. Being a sage is the ultimate goal of learning. Through learning, one knows the content, requirement and standard of *li*, and the truth of morality. After knowing the truth of morality, one can act in accordance with the ritual and moral rules and is able to participate in the practice of *li*. One's desires and emotions also can be transformed by cumulative hard work. Those who achieve the ultimate goal of learning completely transform their desires and they only desire what is recommended and required by the teachings of the sage.

The morally superior person, knowing well that learning that is incomplete and impure does not deserve to be called fine, recites and enumerates his studies that he will be familiar with them, ponders over them and searches into them that he will fully penetrate

¹²⁰ Knoblock revised, p. 139; Watson revised, pp. 19-20.

¹²¹ Xunzi (荀子), "Quan Xue Pian" (勸學篇), trans. Wang Zhonglin (王忠林 譯), Xinyi Xunzi Duben (新譯荀子讀本) Taipei: Sanmin Shuju (臺北市：三民書局), 2006, pp. 3-4. Henceforth "Quan Xue Pian."

their meaning, acts in his person that they will come to dwell within him, and eliminates what is harmful within him that he will hold on to them and be nourished by them. Thereby he causes his eye to be unwilling to see what is contrary to it, his ear unwilling to hear what is contrary to it, his mouth unwilling to speak anything contrary to it, and his mind unwilling to contemplate anything contrary to it. When he has reached the limit of such perfection, he finds delight in it. His eye then finds greater enjoyment in the five colors, his ear in the five sounds, his mouth in the five tastes, and his mind benefits from possessing all that is in the world. When he has reached this stage, power or the personal profit cannot influence him, masses cannot sway him, and the whole world cannot deter him. He follows this one thing in life; he follows it in death. This is what is called constancy of virtue.¹²²

君子知夫不全不粹之不足以爲美也，故誦數以貫之，思索以通之，爲其人以處之，除其害者以持養之。使目非是無欲見也，使耳非是無欲聞也，使口非是無欲言也，使心非是無欲慮也。及至其致好之也，目好之五色，耳好之五聲，口好之五味，心利之有天下。是故權利不能傾也，群眾不能移也，天下不能蕩也。生乎由是，死乎由是，夫是之謂德操。¹²³

In short, learning is just a part of the transformation of human desires. Immersing oneself in the practice of ritual is not only necessary for a complete transformation, but can also cultivate one's personal character. After the transformation, one can express emotions in an appropriate way. This appropriate expression constitutes one's virtue. *Junzi* (君子), the ethically superior person and the ethical ideal advocated by Confucianism, is the person who is virtuous and can express his or her emotions and feelings elegantly. Thus, ritual can exalt a person to

¹²² Revised from Knoblock, p. 142, and Watson, pp. 22-3.

¹²³ "Quan Xue Pian," pp. 5-6.

be an ethically paradigmatic individual. This ennobling function of ritual is a distinctive feature of Confucian ethics and traditional Chinese culture.¹²⁴ Obviously, the consideration of self-cultivation and self-exaltation is beyond the narrow prudent consideration of the benefits and losses brought by personal actions and choices.

Finally, the whole discussion can be summarized by introducing Xunzi's conceptions of good and badness. Order has positive value in Xunzi's thought. Thus, it is good to establish order in society and within oneself. Xunzi does not think that eliminating human desires can bring order to people and societies. Only through controlling one's desires and emotions and the ways of satisfying and expressing them can one establish order within oneself. Social order can also be established more easily and can be long-lasting when each person can control his or her desires and emotions well. It is good that people's desires can be satisfied without exhausting goods and producing social conflicts. *Li* can achieve this. As for badness, for Xunzi, disorder must be bad. Furthermore, any condition in which people cannot satisfy their desires or the satisfaction of desires causing any disorder is bad too. Using Xunzi's own words, good is "upright, reasonable, and orderly", and bad is

¹²⁴ Antonio S Cua, "Ethical Uses of the Past," in his Human Nature, Ritual, and History: Studies in Xunzi and Chinese Philosophy. Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy. Vol. 43 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), p. 167.

“prejudiced, irresponsible, and chaotic”¹²⁵ (所謂善者，正理平治也；所謂惡者，偏險悖亂也).¹²⁶

Although Xunzi’s conception of *li* and the some related issues have been discussed, more needs to be said about the nature and character of the creator of *li*.

That is the sage, or *junzi*.

2.3 The significance of the sage and *junzi*

The sage and morally superior person, *junzi*, is important in Xunzi’s moral philosophy. In the previous sections, it has been revealed that the sage creates *li* to maintain social order and to produce conditions for satisfying people’s desires without causing disorder. Although the sage creates social rules and *li*, this does not mean that he or she is unimportant in a society with well-developed rules and laws. Xunzi thinks that even the existence of a good law may not ensure social harmony.

It is possible to have good laws and still have disorder in the state. But to have a morally superior person acting as ruler and disorder in the state- from ancient times to the present I have never heard of such a thing.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Revised from Watson, p. 166.

¹²⁶ “Xing E Pian,” p. 398.

¹²⁷ Watson revised, p. 38.

故有良法而亂者，有之矣；有君子而亂者，自古及今，未嘗聞也。¹²⁸

He explains why the morally superior person is more important than law:

Thus, the law cannot be established alone, nor can its categories for analogical extension apply themselves in particular instances. If proper men are obtained, then the law will survive; if such men are lost, then it will perish. The law is the first manifestation of order; the morally superior person is the wellspring of the law. Accordingly, if there is a morally superior person, however incomplete the law may be, it is sufficient to be employed everywhere. So too if there is no morally superior person, then however complete the law may be, the loss of the proper application of the proper sequence of ‘first and last’ and the impossibility of appropriate response to evolving affairs is sufficient to cause anarchy.¹²⁹

故法不能獨立，類不能自行；得其人則存，失其人則亡。法者、治之端也；君子者、法之原也。故有君子，則法雖省，足以徧矣；無君子，則法雖具，失先後之施，不能應事之變，足以亂矣。¹³⁰

Xunzi focuses on the application of law and claims that the morally superior person is necessary for a society. The sage and *junzi*, as the creator of laws and *li*, clearly understand the purpose of every particular rule. They also can consider all the relevant factors in applying rules. Thus, negatively, they do not misuse rules.

Positively, they can appropriately apply rules to judge or guide people’s behavior. It

¹²⁸ “Wang Zhi Pian,” p. 116.

¹²⁹ Knoblock revised, p. 176. Instead of “model”, I use “law” to translate the Chinese word “法”. Secondly, the Chinese term “君子” is translated into “morally superior person” instead of “gentleman”.

¹³⁰ Xunzi (荀子), “Jun Dao Pian” (君道篇), trans. Wang Zhonglin (王忠林 譯), *Xinyi Xunzi Duben* (新譯荀子讀本) Taipei: Sanmin Shuju (臺北市：三民書局), 2006, p. 193.

other words, the sage and *junzi* can appropriately respond to the changing environment in using rules and they are able to handle an occasion which has never occurred. Therefore, he concludes that:

There are men who can bring order about, but there is no law that will produce order.¹³¹

有治人，無治法。¹³²

The above is the social function of the sage and *junzi*.

The sage or *Junzi*, for Xunzi, is necessary for those who learn how to behave and transform their desires and emotions in accordance with *li*. He says:

The sage is the acme of the Way (*dao*). Therefore, students study how to become a sage and do not study merely to become one of the people who lacks standards.¹³³

聖人者，道之極也。故學者，固學爲聖人也，非特學爲無方之民也。¹³⁴

Why do people have to learn from the sage? For Xunzi, imitating or being taught by the sage is necessary in learning because, firstly, the sage can exemplify

¹³¹ Knoblock uses “model” to translate the Chinese word “法”, but I use “law” instead. See, John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works. Vol. II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 175.

¹³² “Jun Dao Pian,” p. 193.

¹³³ Revised from Knoblock, p. 61, and Watson, p. 99.

¹³⁴ “Li Lun Pian,” p. 314.

some excellent moral characters and dispositions of behavior. Cultivating these characters and dispositions is one of the ultimate goals of the practice of *li*. The sage can help people understand them by exemplifying them. Furthermore, because of the unspecified detail and the way of following *li* in the Book of Rite, or lijì (禮記), merely studying the classics is insufficient to be a morally superior man and a knowledgeable person. Only by being taught by the sage, can one know how to act in accordance with *li* and its rationale.

In learning, nothing is more profitable than to associate with those who are learned. The Ritual and Music present us with models but do not offer explanation; the Odes and Documents present matters of antiquity but are not always apposite; the Spring and Autumn Annals are laconic and its import cannot be quickly understood. But if one can imitate the morally superior persons and learn their explanations, then he or she will become honored for his or her comprehensive and catholic acquaintance with the affairs of the world. Therefore it is said: “In learning, nothing is more profitable than to associate with those who are learned. And of the road to learning, none is quicker than to love those who are learned. The next best route is exaltation of *li*.”¹³⁵

學莫便乎近其人，《禮》《樂》法而不說，《詩》《書》故而不切，《春秋》約而不速。方其人之習君子之說，則尊以偏矣，周於世矣！故曰：學莫便乎近其人。學之經莫速乎好其人，隆禮次之。¹³⁶

The morally superior person not only exemplifies how to behave excellently in

¹³⁵ Revised from Knoblock, p. 140, and Watson, pp. 20-1.

¹³⁶ “Quan Xue Pian,” p. 4.

accordance with ritual in a particular situation, but also he or she can explain the rationale of the *li*. He or she knows the rationale of *li* because he or she is able to reflect why he or she observes the ritual.

Those who keep to the mean provided by *li* and are able to ponder and meditate on it are said to be able to think. Those who keep to the mean provided by *li* and are able not to alter it are said to be steadfast. One who, being able to think and to stay steadfast, and in addition has a true love for *li*-he is a sage.¹³⁷

禮之中焉能思索，謂之能慮；禮之中焉能勿易，謂之能固。能慮、能固，加好者焉，斯聖人矣。¹³⁸

Therefore, the sage not only can persevere in acting without violating *li*, but also he or she truly loves to follow the *li*.

In short, the sage is an ideal model for imitation. Ordinary people and the sage both have the capacity of knowing the rationale of *li* and morality, and the capacity to put what they know into practice. Fully developing these capacities is necessary for one to be a sage. However, only a sage can thoroughly develop these capacities. Imitating the sage can help ordinary people to develop these capacities. After a long-lasting effort, the sage also develops the capacity to acquire comprehensive

¹³⁷ Revised from Knoblock, p. 61, and Watson, p. 99.

¹³⁸ “Li Lun Pian,” p. 314.

knowledge and considering all relevant factors. This capacity is necessary in the application and modification of law and ritual rules, in creating *li*, in learning and explaining the classics. Apart from the long-lasting effort, how can people obtain comprehensive knowledge and develop the capacity to consider all relevant factors?

This question leads us to the Xunzi's account of the human capacity of knowing. I turn to this topic at the beginning of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Xunzi's moral knowledge and related issues

3.1 *xin*

In the previous section, the functions and characteristics of the sage and *junzi* were discussed. One of the most distinctive characteristics is the ability to consider all relevant factors in solving problems. The cultivation of this ability is closely related to Xunzi's conception of cognitive capacity. The main theme of this section is further to discuss Xunzi's account of human cognitive capacity. Xunzi calls this faculty of cognition *xin* (心). In Confucianism, *xin* has two functions: knowing and feeling. Thus, the more appropriate translation is "heart-mind".¹³⁹ According to Xunzi, heart-mind is responsible for knowing, thinking, understanding, forming concepts and judgments.¹⁴⁰ Xunzi sometimes calls heart-mind *tianjun* (天君) or heavenly lord.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Roger Ames claims that the knowing and feeling functions of heart-mind are interwoven. See Roger Ames (安樂哲), *Ziwo De Yuancheng: Zhongxi Hujing Xia De Gudian Ruxue Yu Daojia* (自我的圓成：中西互鏡下的古典儒學與道家), ed and trans. Peng Guoxiang (彭國翔 編譯), Shijiazhuang: Hebei Renmin Chubanshe (石家莊：河北人民出版社), 2007, p.245.

¹⁴⁰ Wu Rujun (吳汝鈞), *Rujia Zhexue* (儒家哲學) Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu Yinshuguan (臺北市：臺灣商務印書館), 1995, p. 47.

¹⁴¹ Watson, p. 84. The Chinese original text: "Tian Lun Pian," p. 275.

Substantive moral judgments and standards are also known through heart-mind. For Xunzi, knowing the standard of morality is necessary for behaving morally. He says: “The mind must first understand the *Dao* before it can approve the *Dao*, and it must first approve the *Dao* before it can abide by the *Dao* and reject what is at variance with the *Dao*”¹⁴² (心知道然後可道。可道然後能守道以禁非道)。¹⁴³ However, Xunzi thinks that there are twelve factors which can obstruct the heart-mind from knowing the truth which includes the moral standard.

What makes for blindness? One can be blinded by desire or aversion, by the beginnings of things or their end, by what is remote or what is near, by breadth of knowledge or shallowness, by the past or the present. When one makes distinctions among the myriad beings of creation, these distinctions all become potential sources of obsession. This is the universal flaw of the operation of the mind.¹⁴⁴

故爲蔽：欲爲蔽，惡爲蔽，始爲蔽，終爲蔽，遠爲蔽，近爲蔽，博爲蔽，淺爲蔽，古爲蔽，今爲蔽。凡萬物異則莫不相爲蔽，此心術之公患也。¹⁴⁵

Psychologically, our desire and aversion can influence our perception and understanding of things. In the beginning of “Dispelling Blindness” (解蔽篇),¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Watson revised, p. 131.

¹⁴³ Xunzi (荀子), “Jie Bi Pian” (解蔽篇), trans. Wang Zhonglin (王忠林 譯), *Xinyi Xunzi Duben* (新譯荀子讀本) Taipei: Sanmin Shuju (臺北市：三民書局), 2006, p. 354. Henceforth: “Jie Bi Pian.”

¹⁴⁴ Knoblock revised, p. 100; Watson revised, p. 126.

¹⁴⁵ “Jie Bi Pian,” p. 351.

¹⁴⁶ Watson translates the title of this essay as “Dispelling Obsession”.

Xunzi adduces some bad consequences being caused by the ancient kings, high ministers and lords to argue that firstly, desires and hates can make people want to know what is true and right. Secondly, ignoring truth can bring bad consequences. Other kings, high ministers and lords in the past are also used to illustrate the point that effort in dispelling obsessions can produce good consequences.¹⁴⁷

In Xunzi's works, obsession caused by the beginning or the end of things would occur in treating human birth and death. For Xunzi, the birth and death of human beings are equally important. He says: "When both beginning and end are good, man's way is complete"¹⁴⁸ (生,人之始也;死,人之終也;終始俱善,人道畢矣).¹⁴⁹ Thus, "[r]ites are strictest in their ordering of birth and death"¹⁵⁰ (禮者,謹於治生死者也).¹⁵¹ And "the morally superior person is reverent in his treatment of the beginning and careful in his treatment of the end, regarding both with the same gravity"¹⁵² (君子敬始而慎終,終始如一).¹⁵³ Someone who is only reverent in treating death is obsessed by the end, and someone who only takes birth seriously is obsessed by the beginning. Xunzi condemns both of these obsessions.

¹⁴⁷ Knoblock, pp. 100-2; Watson, pp. 126-9; for the Chinese original text, see, "Jie Bi Pian," pp. 351-3.

¹⁴⁸ Watson, p. 100.

¹⁴⁹ "Li Lun Pian," p. 315.

¹⁵⁰ Watson, p. 100.

¹⁵¹ "Li Lun Pian," p. 315.

¹⁵² Watson revised, p. 100.

¹⁵³ "Li Lun Pian," p. 315.

To be generous on occasions of birth but skimpy in the treatment of the dead is to show reverence for a being who has consciousness and contempt for one who has lost it. This is the way of an evil man and to have a heart that rebels against nature...To fail to treat the living with sincere generosity and reverent formality is the way of a rustic; to fail to bury the dead with sincere generosity and reverent formality is the way of a miser. The morally superior person despises rusticity and is ashamed of miserliness.¹⁵⁴

夫厚其生而薄其死，是敬其有知，而慢其無知也，是姦人之道而倍叛之心也。……故事生不忠厚，不敬文，謂之野；送死不忠厚，不敬文，謂之瘠。君子賤野而羞瘠[。]¹⁵⁵

Apart from the context of Xunzi's philosophy, the genetic fallacy is another example of the obsession caused by the beginning of things.¹⁵⁶ In our daily lives, many persons think that the beginning of things is right or good. However, this is just a bias. They may ignore the fact that, firstly, the beginning of things may be very poor. Something can become better as it develops and become quite different from its original condition. Neglect of such possibilities may lead us to make mistakes in reasoning.

Our perception can be interfered with by the distance between ourselves and what we perceive. This perceptual error is caused by what is remote or what is near.

¹⁵⁴ Knoblock revised, pp. 62-3; Watson revised, p. 101.

¹⁵⁵ "Li Lun Pian," p. 315.

¹⁵⁶ This example is suggested by Chen Daqi (陳大齊). See, Chen Daqi (陳大齊), Xunzi Xueshuo (荀子學說) Taipei: Zhonghua Wenhua Chuban Shiye Weiyu (臺北市：中華文化出版事業委員會), 1954, p. 110.

The following is one of the examples of this kind of error found in “Dispelling Blindness” (解蔽篇):

If you look down on a herd of cows from the top of a hill, they will look no bigger than sheep, and yet no one hoping to find sheep is likely to run down the hill after them. It is simply that the distance obscures their actual size. If you look up at a forest from the foot of a hill, the biggest trees appear no taller than chopsticks, and yet no one hoping to find chopsticks is likely to go picking among them. It is simply that the height obscures their actual dimensions.¹⁵⁷

故從山上望牛者若羊，而求羊者不下牽也；遠蔽其大也。從山下望木者，十仞之木若箸，而求箸者不上折也；高蔽其長也。¹⁵⁸

The knowledge one has can be the source of an obsession. Members of primitive tribes misunderstand eclipses as the indication of the anger of God because they know nothing about natural science. However, knowing too much without organizing and unifying what one knows is bad for people too. Xunzi remarks that “[o]ne who, not understanding the moral principles underlying the laws, attempts to rectify the norms contained therein, however broad his views, is bound to produce

¹⁵⁷ Watson, p. 138.

¹⁵⁸ “Jie Bi Pian,” p. 357.

anarchy in what he superintends”¹⁵⁹ (不知法之義而正法之數者，雖博臨事必亂。).¹⁶⁰

Finally, the fallacy of appealing to tradition is the representation of the obsession caused by the past. Traditional thought is not necessarily right, though it has some important social functions and can benefit us and be supported by some reasons. A tradition which was capable of solving many problems in the past could fail to solve new problems because it cannot adapt to the changed environment. Moreover, some negative or harmful consequences are brought by tradition. For example, feminists criticize traditional thought about the social roles of men and women in the family. Always following the traditional way may prevent us from creating other new and better ways to solve problems. However, this does not imply that new inventions, or all new things, or any anti-traditional action must be good. If we think so, we are obsessed by the present. Actually, right or wrong, good or bad, or truth or falsehood cannot be determined merely by whether the relevant items are traditional or new.

¹⁵⁹ Knoblock, p. 176.

¹⁶⁰ “Jun Dao Pian,” p. 193.

What is set forth by Xunzi about the causes of misunderstanding the truth does not include all obstacles to knowing the truth. However, we can know what results in our failure to grasp what the thing really is. Xunzi has already pointed out that most obsessions come from the distinctions of things, though people can understand things through their distinctions. For Xunzi, only when one knows and considers all aspects of things, can one know the truth. We can further understand his conception of truth from his criticism of his contemporary thinkers. At the beginning of “Contra Twelve Philosophers” (非十二子篇), Xunzi refutes his contemporary rival thinkers by saying that all of them only emphasize one aspect of the *Dao* (道), the truth, but neglect other aspects. We can find the same criticism in the last paragraph of “A Discussion of Heaven” (天論篇):

The ten thousand beings are only one aspect of *dao*. One species of beings is only one aspect of the ten thousand beings. The stupid man is only one aspect of one species. He himself believes that he understands the *dao*, though of course he does not. Shenzi could see the advantages of holding back, but not the advantages of taking the lead. Laozi could see the advantages of humbling oneself, but not the advantages of raising one's station. Mozi could see the advantages of uniformity, but not those of diversity. Songzi could see the advantages of having few desires, but not those of having many. If everyone holds back and no one takes the lead, then there will be no gate to advancement for the people. If everyone humbles himself and no one tries to improve his station, then the distinctions between eminent and humble will become meaningless. If there is only uniformity and no diversity, then the commands of government can never be carried out. If there is only a

lessening of desires and never an increase, then there will be no way to educate and transform the people. This is what the *Documents* means when it says: “Do not go by what you like, but follow the *Dao* of the king; do not go by what you hate, but follow the king’s road.”¹⁶¹

萬物爲道一偏，一物爲萬物一偏。愚者爲一物一偏，而自以爲知道，無知也。慎子有見於後，無見於先。老子有見於詘，無見於信。墨子有見於齊，無見於畸。宋子有見於少，無見於多。有後而無先，則群眾無門。有詘而無信，則貴賤不分。有齊而無畸，則政令不施。有少而無多，則群眾不化。《書》曰：「無有作好，遵王之道。無有作惡，遵王之路。」此之謂也。¹⁶²

In this passage, Xunzi criticizes contemporary thinkers for failing to know the truth because they only emphasize one of the aspects of things. All of them ignore other equally important aspects. Their ignorance results in different kinds of implausible thinking.

Moreover, at the beginning of the essay “Dispelling Obsession” (解蔽篇), Xunzi explicitly indicates that it is common for people to be obsessed by “only one of the aspect of truth and failing to comprehend its overall principles”¹⁶³ (凡人之患，蔽於一曲，而闕於大理。)¹⁶⁴ In line with the previous passages, he also criticizes his contemporary rivals for failing to see that what they think of as the truth

¹⁶¹ I have modified Watson’s translation in two places. First, I use “*dao*” instead of “way” to translate the Chinese word “道”. Second, Watson uses the word “corner” but I use “aspect” to translate the Chinese word “偏”. See Watson, pp. 91-2.

¹⁶² “Tian Lun Pian,” p. 279.

¹⁶³ Watson revised, p. 125.

¹⁶⁴ “Jie Bi Pian,” p. 351.

is just one of the aspects of the *Dao*: “[W]ith their limited understanding [they] saw one aspect of the *dao* and, failing to understand that it was only an aspect, they considered it sufficient and proceeded to expound it in engaging terms”¹⁶⁵ (曲知之人，觀於道之一隅，而未之能識也，故以爲足而飾之)¹⁶⁶ According to Xunzi, the true *dao* “must embody constant principles and be capable of embracing all changes”¹⁶⁷ (夫道者，體常而盡變)¹⁶⁸ Thus, “one aspect is an insufficient basis for drawing conclusions about it”¹⁶⁹ (一隅不足以舉之)¹⁷⁰ In other words, the theories suggested by those thinkers are untenable because they fail to consider all relevant aspects of things. This fault results in their theories being far from the truth.

For Xunzi, sages understand how to know the truth and can prevent themselves from being blinded by being concerning with only one aspect of things.

The sage knows the flaws of the mind’s operation and perceives the misfortunes of blindness and being closed to the truth. This is why he is without desires and aversions, without beginnings and ends of things, without the remote or near, without broadness or shallowness, without antiquity or modernity. He lays out all the myriad things and causes himself to exactly match how each settles on the suspended balance. This is why for the sage, the multitude of different reactions to things cannot produce obsession by one thing’s beclouding another and so disturbing their proper position. What is the balance? I

¹⁶⁵ Watson revised, p. 130.

¹⁶⁶ “Jie Bi Pian,” p. 353.

¹⁶⁷ Watson, p. 130.

¹⁶⁸ “Jie Bi Pian,” p. 353.

¹⁶⁹ Knoblock, p. 103.

¹⁷⁰ “Jie Bi Pian,” p. 353.

say that it is the *Dao*.¹⁷¹

聖人知心術之患，見蔽塞之禍，故無欲無惡，無始無終，無近無遠，無博無淺，無古無今，兼陳萬物而中縣衡焉。是故眾異不得相蔽以亂其倫也。何謂衡？曰：道。¹⁷²

However, in the above passage, Xunzi does not explain how sages can know the truth by balancing all related factors. His explanation follows:

How does a man understand the Way? Through the mind. And how can the mind understand it? Because it is empty, unified, and still. The mind is constantly storing up things, and yet it is said to be empty. The mind is constantly marked by diversity, and yet it is said to be unified. The mind is constantly moving, and yet it is said to be still. Man is born with capacity of knowing, and where there is capacity of knowing there is memory. Memory is what is stored up in the mind. Yet the mind is said to be empty because what has already been stored up in it does not hinder the reception of new impressions. Therefore it is said to be empty. Heart-mind is born with capacity of knowing, and where there is capacity of knowing there is an awareness of differences. An awareness of differences means that one can have an understanding of a variety of facts at the same time, and where there is such understanding, there is diversity. And yet the mind is said to be unified because it does not allow the understanding of one fact to impinge upon that of another. Therefore it is said to be unified. When the mind is asleep, it produces dreams; when it is unoccupied, it wanders off in idle fancy; and if allowed to do so, it will produce from these all manner of plots and schemes. Hence the mind is constantly moving. And yet it is said to be still, because it does not allow such dreams and noisy fancies to disorder its understanding. Therefore it is said to be still. A man who has not yet attained the *Dao* but is seeking it should be urged to take emptiness, unity and stillness as his guides. If he who seeks to abide by the *Dao* has emptiness, then he may enter into it; if he who seeks to serve the *Dao* has unity, then he may master it; if he who seeks to meditate on the *Dao* has stillness, then he may perceive it. He who understands the *Dao* and perceives its nature, he

¹⁷¹ Knoblock, p. 103.

¹⁷² “Jie Bi Pian,” pp. 353-4.

who understands the *Dao* and carries it out, may be said to embody the Way. Emptiness, unity, and stillness—there are the qualities of great and pure enlightenment.¹⁷³

人何以知道？曰心。心何以知？曰虛壹而靜。心未嘗不臧也，然而有所謂虛；心未嘗不滿也，然而有所謂壹；心未嘗不動也，然而有所謂靜。人生而有知，知而有志，志也者，臧也；然而有所謂虛；不以所已內藏害所將受，謂之虛。心生而有知，知而有異，異也者，同時兼知之；同時兼知之，兩也；然而所有謂一；不以夫一害此一謂之壹。心臥則夢，偷則自行，使之則謀；故心未嘗不動也，然而有所謂靜；不以夢劇亂知謂之靜。未得道而求道者，謂之虛壹而靜。作之則將須道者之虛則入，將事道者之壹則盡，盡將思道者靜則察。知道察，知道行，體道者也。虛壹而靜，謂之大清明。¹⁷⁴

Although Xunzi holds that memory is one of the constituents of knowledge, sometimes it can prevent us from acquiring and memorizing new knowledge. Thus, heart-mind has to be “empty” (or at least not too full!) in order to acquire new knowledge. As for the unity of heart-mind, even though, for Xunzi, knowledge comes from the differentiation of things, it is necessary for the heart-mind to be the state of what he calls “oneness”. Under this state, the heart-mind can concentrate itself to know one thing without being interfered with by what we have known. Finally, our heart-mind always operates even though we are sleeping. Dream and imagination may disturb us from knowing the truth. To avoid knowing the false by the interference of dream or imagination, we have to keep our heart-mind still when

¹⁷³ Watson revised, pp. 131-2.

¹⁷⁴ “Jie Bi Pian,” p. 354.

we know, perceive, or understand things or events.¹⁷⁵ If the heart-mind can be empty, unified and still, it is in the state of “great and pure enlightenment”. This is the ideal state of knowing in which we can free from any subjective mental error and can grasp the truth of things.

3.1.1 Xin as a decision maker

Another function of heart-mind is to be an arbiter and to judge whether it is right to act in order to satisfy a desire. In section 2.2.5, when we discussed the concept of *wei*, this decision-making function of heart-mind was introduced. It can deliberate and adjudicate whether an emotion is appropriate for acting in accordance with. If it is so, heart-mind will approve of the action. In addition to emotion, heart-mind can also approve or disapprove of desires.

What men desire most is life, and what they hate most is death. Be that as it may, men sometimes follow the pursuit of life and end up with death. It is not that they do not really desire life and rather desire death; it is that it proved impossible to continue living and it was possible to die. Thus, when desires run to excess, actions do not reach that point because the mind stops them. If what the mind permits coincides with reason, then although the desires be numerous, how could there be harm to order! Although the desires are not strong enough to motivate a person, his actions may exceed his desires because the

¹⁷⁵ A. C. Graham, Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1989), p. 253.

mind has ordered them to do so. If what the mind permits conflicts with what is reasonable, then although the desires be few, how could it stop at disorder! Thus, order and disorder lie in what the mind permits and not with the desires that belong to our essential natures.¹⁷⁶

人之所欲生甚矣，人之惡死甚矣，然而人有從生成死者，非不欲生而欲死也，不可以生而可以死也。故欲過之而動不及，心止之也，心之所可中理，則欲雖多，奚傷於治！欲不及而動過之，心使之也。心之所可失理，則欲雖寡，奚止於亂！故治亂在於心之所可，亡於情之所欲。¹⁷⁷

The heart-mind can choose among desires and emotions, because it can know the *Dao*, that is, what is good and what is bad. When the heart-mind knows the moral truth, it will follow it.

All men will abide by what they think is good and reject what they think is bad. It is inconceivable, therefore, that any man could understand that there is nothing in the world to compare to the *Dao*, and yet not abide by it.¹⁷⁸

凡人莫不從其所可，而去其所不可，知道之莫之若也，而不從道者，無之有也。¹⁷⁹

Thus, in Xunzi's moral philosophy, the truth of moral belief is necessary to its being appropriate or genuinely wise.¹⁸⁰ If heart-mind fails to know the truth of moral

¹⁷⁶ Knoblock, p. 135.

¹⁷⁷ "Zheng Ming Pian," p. 379.

¹⁷⁸ Watson revised, p. 156.

¹⁷⁹ "Zheng Ming Pian," p. 380.

¹⁸⁰ It has been argued that the necessary connection between epistemology and ethics is part of the Confucian tradition. See, Fengqi (馮契), *Zhongguo Gudai Zhexue Da Luoji Fazhan: Shangce* (中國古代哲學的邏輯發展：上冊) Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe (上海：上海人民出版社), 1983,

rules, it may approve the desires and emotions which can result in bad consequences when one acts in accordance with them. The sage knows what things can obsess our thinking and avoids them. To avoid obsession, one has to consider all relevant factors and should not overlook or overemphasize any one of them. Thus, for Xunzi, the sage can keep his or her heart-mind in the perfect status in which he or she can know the truth by considering all relevant factors. This characteristic of the sage provides a resource for explaining how moral rules can be true when Xunzi's moral thought is reconstructed in terms of subjective naturalism. In the following sections, I will elucidate how Xunzi's moral thought can be reconstructed in terms of this contemporary Western metaethical theory. Firstly, I will outline the contemporary theories of metaethics so as to be in a better position to situate the line of thought known as subjective naturalism.

3.2 The outline of modern naturalism

Following Finlay's analysis, contemporary moral realism can be divided into four groups: semantic, ontological, metaphysical and normative. Different groups of realism argue that moral claims can be true by different strategies. However, no

pp. 89-90.

matter what method is taken by various groups of realists, it has to meet two requirements. On the one hand, morality has some appearances which lead us to concede that moral claims are objective and they can be true. On the other hand, it is also required that morality fits with our general and empirical understanding of human beings and the world.¹⁸¹ In short, emphasizing the objective features of morality is the common characteristic of moral realists.

3.2.1 Ontological realism

To explain what makes moral claims true, ontological realists appeal to moral facts, properties, entities, and so on. However, Mackie argues that moral properties and moral facts are metaphysically, epistemologically and practically queer. They are too queer to be accepted as a part of the world.¹⁸²

Moral properties or entities are metaphysical queer because they have some strange characteristics, such as causal impotence. Since moral properties cannot cause anything, it seems that people cannot know them through perception. Some philosophers suggest that people can know them through intuition. However, we do

¹⁸¹ Finlay calls the former internal accommodation and the later external accommodation. See, Stephen Finlay, "Four Faces of Moral Realism," *Philosophy Compass* 26 (2007): 822.

¹⁸² *Ibid*; 826. See also J.L.Mackie, Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 38-41.

not understand what it is and how it operates. This claim just uses one mystery to answer a previous mystery. As for practical queerness, ordinarily, people think that moral claims connect closely with human motivation and action. However, firstly, it is unclear how moral entities can motivate us to act or not to act, because they are causal impotent. Secondly, even though some realists suggest a peculiar connection between moral reality and human motivation, it does not fit with our general theories of motivation and agency.

3.2.2 Naturalism

The camp of ontological moral realism gives different responses to the antirealist's challenge because the camp can be further divided into two groups: naturalism and non-naturalism. The main difference between naturalism and non-naturalism is whether moral properties are natural. The naturalists claim that moral properties are natural but the non-naturalists deny it. Ordinarily, natural properties are regarded as the objects of the empirical sciences. However, science is a general name. It consists of different subjects and each of them has its unique objects of study. This implies that the characteristics of objects of sciences are various. They

have, however, some basic features, such as spatiotemporal existence, causal efficaciousness, and empirical accessibility.¹⁸³ As for non-naturalism, it insists that moral terms or concepts cannot be analyzed into natural terms or concepts and moral properties cannot be reduced to natural ones.¹⁸⁴ For non-naturalists, moral properties are *sui generis*. This does not mean, however, that non-naturalists have to identify non-natural moral properties with Platonic Ideas or other supernatural properties. They propose that moral properties supervene on the natural ones. Furthermore, not only some of them deny that natural properties necessarily have causal efficacy,¹⁸⁵ but also insist that we can a priori know some important moral facts by intuition.

The camp of naturalism can be further divided into subjective, objective, analytic and non-analytic.¹⁸⁶ Analytic naturalism holds that moral terms can be analyzed in terms of non-moral ones. Non-analytic naturalism, on the one hand, insists that moral terms are not synonymous with any non-moral terms. On the other hand, it allows that certain natural properties are identical with the properties which

¹⁸³ Ibid; 827.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid; 828.

¹⁸⁵ Shafer-Landau claims that some natural properties are causally inert. Bloomfield says that some biological properties, such as healthiness and being alive, are natural but are useless in causal explanation. See, Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism : A Defence* (New York, NY: Clarendon Press, 2003), p. 58; and Paul Bloomfield, *Moral Reality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 28.

¹⁸⁶ Stephen Finlay, "Four Faces of Moral Realism", *Philosophy Compass* 26 (2007): 827, 829.

are predicated by moral terms.¹⁸⁷ Subjective and objective naturalism disagree over whether the truth of moral claim is attitude-independent. Actually, both of them have different forms. The content of subjective naturalism is influenced by the agent's attitudes and traits. The simplest theory of this sort concerns actual agents and identifies moral facts with facts about their attitudes. The sophisticated one chooses the agent who is perfectly rational and fully informed and identifies moral facts with the actions or desires that would be desired or approved by the ideal one. The advantage of subjective naturalism is that it accommodates well with the world. We can know and investigate the nature of facts about actual or hypothetical attitudes by empirical processes. However, it may be hard to maintain the objective pretension of moral discourse. Firstly, moral claims do not seem merely to describe one's attitudes. Secondly, the universality of moral requirements may be sacrificed when moral fact is based on one's attitudes. To save the universality of moral requirements, some suggest that all rational agents would converge on the same set of desires.¹⁸⁸ Others appeal to the ideal observer or shared attitudes. Richard Joyce argues that it is hard for all agents to converge on a common set of desires because the desires of actual

¹⁸⁷ Ibid; 828-9.

¹⁸⁸ Michael Smith, The Moral Problem (Maldon, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 173, 187-9.

agents are too diverse to converge on this common set of desires simply by being corrected from the standpoint of a rational agent.¹⁸⁹ The alternative is unsuccessful because it is difficult to give reason to persuade others to conform to the attitudes of others. After briefly introducing these contemporary theories of metaethics, especially naturalism, I will try to elucidate that Xunzi's moral thought is compatible with subjective realism.

3.3 Subjective realism and Xunzi's moral thought

As discussed before, subjective natural realism identifies moral facts with the agent's attitudes or desires. Given our discussion of Xunzi's moral thought, the sage, or in some contexts, the morally superior person, can be regarded as the ideal agent. Marshall reconstructs Xunzi's sage king as an ideal legislator.¹⁹⁰ On this view, the moral status of an act is determined by whether it violates or is allowed by a rule legislated by the sage king. If an act X is uncontroversially proscribed by some uncontroversially moral or ritual rule, then X is morally wrong. The moral judgment "X is wrong" is objectively true.¹⁹¹ In other words, the truth of the moral judgment

¹⁸⁹ Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 89-94.

¹⁹⁰ John Marshall, "Hsun Tzu's Moral Epistemology," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 14 (1987): 491.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

is constituted by the fact that this act is proscribed or is allowed by a particular moral or ritual rule legislated by the sage king.

Some may challenge the idea that the sage king is necessary as one of the key truth conditions of any moral judgment. Given the above analysis, it is clear that what makes the judgment “X is wrong” true is the wide-accepted uncontroversial moral or ritual rule. Since this rule is accepted by the most of the members of a community, the wrongness of any action which results from the violation of this rule is also widely accepted within the group. Thus, what makes the judgment “any act which is proscribed by this rule is wrong” true is the fact that most of the members in this society accept this rule and the moral standard implied from it. If this analysis is correct, the sage king is redundant for the truth of any moral judgment.

Marshall thinks that the sage king is necessary for making any moral judgment true or false because a law would be accepted by the people when the sage king legislates it. Based on the character of the sage king, Marshall says, the law deserves people’s respect and allegiance. The law has authority because the benevolence of the king is expressed through legislating it.¹⁹²

Marshall’s work primarily reveals that the moral philosophy of Xunzi is

¹⁹² Ibid.

compatible with subjective naturalism. However, he just sketches the structure of the theory. I try to further develop his theory to give a more detail account of Xunzi's perspective on moral knowledge. Railton's moral realism will be adapted to that end.

3.3.1 Railton's account of non-moral value

For Railton, a thing has non-moral value when "it is desirable for someone or good for him."¹⁹³ Actually, when I judge that "it is desirable for me" that just means "I desire it". However, this definition is untenable because we may desire x in a situation where I am not well-informed, or where I miscalculate the consequence of getting the thing desired, or where I confuse the thing wanted with other things, or ignore some other relevant factors, and so on. In Xunzi's words, under these conditions, our desire for x is based on obsession, *bi* (蔽).

To refine the definition, the ideal self is introduced. This self desires one thing in a condition in which he or she is free from ignorance, miscalculation and is fully informed, etc. Thus, A is desirable for a person P when P would desire A if P were fully informed and ideally rational.

The Problem of this refined definition is that the ideal self does not desire a

¹⁹³ Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," Philosophical Review, 95:2 (1986): 173.

thing which is desired by the actual self in a given situation. Thus, the ideal self is useless for the actual self. For example, the actual self of Alex desires to call his friend to ask how to go to Tuen Mun (屯門) from Tai Po (大埔). But his ideal self, who is already fully informed, does not desire to phone his friend. To connect the ideal self and the actual one, the definition is refined as follows:

A is desirable for a person P when ideal self P desires the non-ideal self P to desire A. The ideal self is unqualified cognitive and [has] imaginative powers, and full factual and nomological information about his physical and psychological constitution, capacities, circumstances, history, and so on... has completed and vivid knowledge of himself and his environment, and whose instrumental rationality is in no way defective.¹⁹⁴

To examine whether his account of non-moral value can characterize the facts about non-moral value, Railton addresses two criteria for a generic stratagem of naturalistic realism. He says that any reality has these two characteristics:¹⁹⁵

- 1) Independence: it exists and has certain determinate features independent of whether we think it exists or has those features, independent, even, of whether we have good reason to think this;
- 2) Feedback: it is such-and we are such-that we are able to interact with it, and this interaction exerts the relevant sort of shaping influence or control upon our perceptions,

¹⁹⁴ Ibid; 173-4.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid; 172.

thought, and action.

Railton makes use of the following example to illustrate how his account of non-moral value can meet these two requirements.

Lonnie feels lethargic when he travels in a foreign country and he desires to drink milk. However, he does not know that he is seriously dehydrated. Lethargy is the symptom of dehydration. Drinking milk only makes him worse.¹⁹⁶ Now, assume that his ideal self has full information and is rational; in that case he will desire the actual self not to desire milk and will desire water instead. But Lonnie finally drinks milk and feels much worse. Consider other visitor, Tad. He desires water. His ideal self desires his actual self to desire water. Railton claims his notion of non-moral goods can explain the difference. Lonnie feels worse because his desire does not coincide with what was desirable for him. Ted feels better because his desire coincides with what was desirable for him. Railton claims that if Ted desires water because he has known it already through learning, training, or whatsoever, we can explain that Ted feels better because he has known what is good for him.¹⁹⁷

Railton explains how his notion of non-moral value can fulfill the conditions of

¹⁹⁶ Ibid; 174-5.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid; 178.

independence and feed-back. As for the condition of independence, even though what is desirable for Lonnie in the given circumstance is constituted by how the ideal self of Lonnie stands in the position of the actual self, the ideal one would be desirable for the actual Lonnie to want, the truth of what is desirable is not merely what Lonnie, whether ideal or non-ideal, thinks or has good reason to think. The truth of it also depends on other facts. For example, if water is desirable for the actual Lonnie, the truth that water is desirable for Lonnie is not merely based on the ideal Lonnie's desire; there are other facts which the ideal Lonnie has to consider in deciding whether water or milk is desirable. Those facts include Lonnie's circumstances, his bodily condition, the consequence of continued dehydration, and so on.¹⁹⁸

As for the condition of feedback, Railton explains it by means of how his notion of non-moral good explains the evolution of one's desire. Assume that Lonnie feels bad after drinking milk. He cannot fall asleep and goes out to buy milk. However, all the milk in the store is sold out. The boss of the store gives him a bottle of clear liquid to satisfy him. He goes back and drinks the unknown liquid before falling asleep. After waking up, he feels better. Since he still wants to drink milk, he goes to

¹⁹⁸ Ibid; 175.

the store again. The milk has been delivered. However, since he feels better, it leads him to buy the unknown liquid rather than milk. He drinks it and feels much better. Finally, he drinks the unknown liquid during the journey.¹⁹⁹ Initially, he desires milk, but after getting the pleasure from drinking the unknown liquid which is actually desirable for him, he changes his desire. Finally, he loses the desire for milk and desires the unknown liquid in similar situations in the future. Thus, the fact about what is desirable for him explains why his desire evolves.

Furthermore, these sorts of explanations, Railton suggests, may support some qualified predictions. Firstly, when one obtains more information and experience, one's knowledge of one's good should increase. Secondly, people with similar personal and social characteristics will tend to have similar value in some circumstances because the ideal self will take into account what her actual self is like and her circumstances. Thirdly, in some areas of life, where individuals are most alike in some aspects, what is good for one person will tend to approach what is good for another. Fourth, we would expect that, *ceteris paribus*, one will judge what is good for oneself better than others do because a person's good is determined by what

¹⁹⁹ Alexander Miller, *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics* (Cambridge: Polity press, 2003), p. 190.

his fully informed and ideally rational self would want her to want given her actual circumstances.²⁰⁰

As for moral value, Railton's account can be expressed in the following form:

x is morally right if and only if x would be approved of by an ideally instrumentally rational and fully informed agent considering the question 'How best to maximize the amount of non-moral goodness?' from a social point of view in which the interests of all potentially affected individuals were counted equally.²⁰¹

There are several points worth noting here. Firstly, Railton insists that a social point of view is required in accounting for moral value. He enumerates the distinctive features of moral norms. The criteria of choice which determine moral resolutions are non-indexical and comprehensive; pure prudential reasons may be subordinated; moral evaluation concerns the assessment of conduct or character, rationality of moral norms is not from a point of view of particular individual.²⁰² The above distinctive features of morality emphasize impartiality. Thus, he insists that an impartial social point of view is necessary for moral value. Impartiality requires us to consider every individual. Thus, the interests of all potentially affected individuals

²⁰⁰ Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review*, 95:2 (1986): 182.

²⁰¹ Alexander Miller, *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics* (Cambridge: Polity press, 2003), p. 196.

²⁰² Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review*, 95:2 (1986): 189-90.

were counted equally. Railton thinks that non-moral value and moral value, in some sense, are parallel. Both of them can explain and affect people's behavior. When the arrangement of a society does not coincide with instrumental rationality and the social point of view in which the interests of all potentially affected individuals were counted equally, social dissatisfaction occurs. A society that departs from social rationality might undergo social unrest. Those whose interests are discounted unreasonably will not follow or will rebel against the current social system. Thus, feedback mechanism exists in moral value too. The evolution of social structures can be explained in term of social rationality.²⁰³

Having introduced Railton's subjective naturalism, I will next show how Xunzi's moral thought can be reconstructed as a form of subjective naturalism.

3.3.2 Xunzi's subjective naturalism

To reconstruct Xunzi's moral thought as a contemporary subjective naturalism, the sage is the significant element. As discussed above, the sage, as an ideal, knows all the sources of obsessions. In other words, he or she is free from any fault of irrationality. The sage attempts to know all aspects of things and to consider all

²⁰³ Ibid; 191.

relevant factors in handling a problem, in judging other behavior, in deciding what he or she should do, and in creating moral and ritual rules. In other words, the sage considers everything. In this sense, the sage is similar to Railton's ideal self. He or she, after cultivation, can keep his or her mind empty, unified and still. In this state, the heart-mind is free from any obsession and does not ignore or consider only one of the aspects of things. The heart-mind of the sage can consider all relevant aspects of things. In this state, one can know the *Dao*. The *Dao* consists of all aspects of things. After the heart-mind knows the *Dao*, it can adjudicate the appropriateness of emotions and desires and decide which emotions and desires should be allowed to motivate action. One example is the creation of *li*. Xunzi says the sage hates disorder and chaos. Thus, he or she creates *li* to curb human desires, to transform human emotions, to divide people into different social status. The forming of *li* can be expressed in the following way:

- 1) The sage hates disorder and desires order and anything which can bring order when he or she is free from mistakes of thinking, knows and considers all

relevant aspects, is rational, etc.²⁰⁴

- 2) The sage, in an ideal condition, knows that people struggling over the means for satisfying their own desires is the cause of disorder. He also knows that human desires are unlimited. But he knows that human beings have some capacities and wants which go beyond the basic human needs.
- 3) The sage, in an ideal condition, knows that division, *fen* (分) is one of the capacities of human beings. He knows the amount of resources in society. He knows the amount of resources needed to satisfy all members of society. He also knows the amount of resources required to satisfy the basic needs of each particular person. He knows the productive power of each member.
- 4) The sage, in an ideal condition, knows the way of dividing the resources which can satisfy the particular basic needs of each member. He also knows the ways of allocating work to each member so as to maximize production. He knows his way of dividing resources and workloads can bring order to the society.
- 5) The sage, in an ideal condition, desires this division.

²⁰⁴ I use “ideal condition” to represent all of these contents.

This way of division is *li*. I borrow Railton's subjective naturalism and modify it to allege that moral goodness is what is desirable by the sage who is in an ideal condition.

I will show how my account of Xunzi's conception of moral goodness can fulfill two conditions suggested by Railton. Firstly, a thing is good not only because we think that it is or because we have good reason to think that it is. The above example of the creation of *li* reveals that there are other facts, such as human nature, capacity, the amount of resources, etc, that determine that *li* is good. Thus, my account can fulfill the condition of independence. As for the condition of feedback, consider a man X who lives outside the community in which *li* is established. X enjoys his life because he is free. However, sometimes, he is angered by some inconvenience in daily life. He lives alone so he has to maintain his house, find food, and perform other tasks. One day, he goes to the community to find job. A restaurant employs him but he has to stay in the staff hostel. To earn money, he accepts the offer. At first, he cannot adapt to the community life because he has to obey the *li*. Generally, he can live conveniently because of the division of labor. Before living in the community, it is very troublesome when he gets sick because no one takes care of him or works for

him. He also has to seek for food and handle much housework. After working in the community, even though he gets sick, he can rest in the hostel, have his lunch and dinner without cooking by himself. He wants to stay in the community and work. At first, Mr. X has no desire to stay in this ritual community. Generally, he gets pleasure from the ritual life. Finally, he has no desire to leave the community. But he develops a desire for living in the community. Thus, the fact of moral goodness transforms his desire. If what I say is true, then my account can satisfy the condition of feedback.

In the following sections, I will discuss some implications for Xunzi's philosophy.

3.4 Normative ethics and metaethics

I think Xunzi's moral thought has some implications for the issue of the relation between normative ethics and metaethics. As the study of the meanings of the moral terms, such as 'ought', 'good', 'bad', etc, and the meanings of the moral judgments, metaethics appears in the early twentieth century. Sometimes, metaethics is regarded as a reflection of normative ethics. However, the relation between these two orders of moral theories is unclear. Generally, there are two different statements about their

relation. Some say that meta-ethics is normatively neutral. On the other hand, some think that different kinds of relation, such as entailment, causal effect, etc., exist between ethical theories and meta-ethical theories. I call the former neutralists and the latter non-neutralists. About the question ‘are meta-ethical theories normatively neutral,’ Blackstone thinks that this question can be divided into six different questions. They are:²⁰⁵

- 1) Do metaethical analyses affect one’s moral life?
- 2) Are metaethical theories logical entailments of normative ethical positions?
- 3) Do metaethical theories logically entail certain normative ethical statements?
- 4) Do metaethical theories logically entail certain accounts of moral justification?
- 5) Are metaethical theories set forth simply and solely as descriptively true theories rather than as prescriptions concerning the way moral language ought to be used and interpreted?
- 6) Do metaethical theories have a normative function?

Blackstone gives a positive answer to questions 1), 4) and 6), while his answer to 3) and 5) are negative. As for the answer to question 2), he insists that metaethical theories are neutral on normative ethical positions, even though some first-order ethical theories are entailed by meta-level ethical theories. I summarize and discuss

²⁰⁵ William T. Blackstone, “Are Metaethical Theories Normatively Neutral?” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, XXXIX, 1961, rpt. in *Readings in Contemporary Ethical Theory*, eds. Kenneth Pahl and Marvin Schiller, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 496.

his arguments which support his answers to those questions below.

3.4.1 Metaethical theory and one's moral life

Blackstone thinks that one's view of morality is affected by committing oneself to a particular metaethical theory, though this is not necessary. Generally, the nature of moral judgments and their justification will be changed by a particular metaethical point of view. For example, if we accept the emotivist's account of the nature of moral judgment, our view of and attitude toward moral judgment will change to be that rationality and reason are excluded from ethical discourse because all ethical statements just express one's feelings or emotions, which cannot be true or false. Furthermore, the justification of moral judgment is annihilated under emotivism. All of these views also affect one's life since evaluating other ethical judgments, and making and justifying our own moral judgments are indispensable to our daily life. In a society where emotivism is prevalent, the relationship among people will be manipulative and everyone becomes a means for achieving other persons' goals.²⁰⁶

Thus, one's moral life can be affected by metaethical theories.

²⁰⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), chapter 3.

3.4.2. Normative ethical theories and metaethical theories

In the history of ethics, we can find some cases where normative ethical theory entails metaethical theory. For example, due to his commitment to the principle of utility, the meanings of all ethical terms are specified by utilitarianism in Bentham's ethics. However, Blackstone thinks that it is not the case that Bentham defines ethical terms in terms of his own normative ethical commitment.²⁰⁷ Since metaethics need not commit one to any particular ethical view, it is morally neutral.

3.4.3 Metaethical theories and moral judgment

Even though our moral life and an account of moral justification are both affected by different metaethical discourse, Blackstone thinks that metaethical theories are neutral with regard to any normative ethical statement.²⁰⁸ One's metaethical state has no any connection with a particular moral judgment. In other words, whatever you are an emotivist, realist or intuitionist, you can still make a claim that killing a cat for fun is morally wrong. However, this neutral thesis of

²⁰⁷ William T. Blackstone, "Are Metaethical Theories Normatively Neutral?" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, XXXIX, 1961, rpt. in *Readings in Contemporary Ethical Theory*, eds. Kenneth Pahel and Marvin Schiller, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 493.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

metaethics is false. Error theory, one of the metaethical theories, is a metaethical view that all moral judgment is false. If one adopts this view, one should not believe any moral judgment and one should abandon belief in all first-order moral theories. After all, holding false beliefs is irrational.²⁰⁹ Error theory exemplifies that some metaethical theories are no neutral in relation to normative ethical statements.

3.4.4 Metaethical theories and moral justification

A particular metaethical theory can alter one's moral life because it can change one's conception of justifying moral judgment and the view of what one is doing when one makes a moral judgment. Obviously, the account of moral justification is entailed by a specific metaethical standpoint. I have illustrated this by means of emotivism previously. Thus I do not say more about this.

3.4.5 The descriptive or prescriptive role of metaethics

Blackstone adduces emotivism and intuitionism to deny that metaethical theories are normatively neutral. Both theories do not simply describe the use of

²⁰⁹ It is hard to entirely abandon all moral judgment because it strongly violates our intuition. Proponents of error theory try to reconcile their view and the moral intuition of common people by emphasizing the pragmatic function of morality. See, Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), and J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1990).

moral language. Even though there are numerous examples showing that moral judgment can be true, (for example, moral judgments can take the form of indicative sentences, they are the object of cognitive verbs, such as “know”, “believe”, and appraisal terms can be applied to them) emotivists still argue that it is not their real meaning. In this way, emotivists implicitly adduce some norm to prescribe the use and interpretation of moral terms.²¹⁰

3.4.6 Metaethical theories and normative function

Metaethical theories have a normative function. Normative ethical theories can introduce greater rationality into human life when metaethical theory clarifies the nature and logic of human moral experience. He adduces five criteria suggested by Paul Taylor to test the ability of metaethical theories to increase rationality in our moral life. These criteria are:²¹¹

- 1) Contribution of factual understanding of moral practice in daily life;
- 2) Contribution of analysing moral discourse for better recognizing the ambiguity, vagueness and the purpose of uses of moral language;
- 3) Contribution of clear and intelligent use of first-order moral discourse;
- 4) Explicating rules of valid reasoning which are appropriate to moral argument and

²¹⁰ Ibid; 493.

²¹¹ Ibid; 494.

comparing and contrasting rules of valid moral reasoning with rules of valid reasoning in other subjects;

5) Clearly showing the application of rules of valid moral reasoning in daily life.

Actually, criteria 2, 3, 4, 5 highly depend upon 1. Understanding more about what is happening in daily moral practice, it is much easier for us to recognize the ambiguity and vagueness of moral terms, and carry on the daily moral discourse clearly and intelligently. If moral discourse just expresses emotion, then the existence of a rule of valid moral reason is problematic. Since criterion one is extremely significant, every significant metaethical theory has to at least partly describe the uses and meanings of moral terms. Actually, several metaethical theories describe different functions and roles of moral concepts. Thus, Blackstone suggests that “a correct metaethic would be one that displays all the uses or roles performed by moral concepts.”²¹²

3.4.7 Response from Xunzi’s perspective

Blackstone understands metaethics as the subject of analyzing the meaning of moral terms and discourse. Although Xunzi mainly focuses on the truth of moral

²¹² Ibid; 495.

judgment, he also concerns the meanings and uses of moral terms as well as justification. He emphasizes the correct use of moral terms. The fully informed and fully rational sage can adjudicate the reasonableness of moral rules. However, I still focus on his account of moral truth in order to understand the relation between normative ethics and metaethics.²¹³ In Xunzi's moral thought, the truth of morality is the foundation of his whole ethical practice. The rationale of *li* is based on the sage's creation. As a fully informed and fully rational ideal, the sage knows the truth of right and good and establishes moral rules based on moral truths. Obviously, the metaethical standpoint strongly supports the normative statements, such as ritual (moral) rules.

Xunzi understands moral good as order and harmony. Thus, the whole ritual practice aims at and is designed to maintain these two states. Through the practice of *li*, social order can be retained, human emotions remain in a stable state because of the appropriate expression prescribed by *li*. All these points reveal the firm connection between normative and metaethical ethics in Xunzi's moral thought.

²¹³ See, A. S. Cua, Ethical Argumentation: A Study in Hsün Tzu's Moral Epistemology (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985).

3.5 The pragmatic goal of pursuing knowledge

Although the truth of morality is necessary for Xunzi's moral philosophy, it does not follow that he has a great interest in theoretical knowledge. The pursuit of the truth of moral belief is never for its own sake, but for moral or other pragmatic purposes. Sages and *junzi*, the ideal model in Xunzi's philosophy, completely reflect this kind of attitude toward knowledge. Even though sages and *junzi* can well develop their heart-mind to know the truth, this does not mean that they know all the truth in the universe.

When the morally superior person is termed "wise," this does not imply that he can know all that knowledgeable men know. When he is termed "discriminating," this does not mean that he is able to discriminate all that dialecticians can discriminate. When he is termed an "exacting investigator," this does not mean that he can investigate with exactness all that a professional investigator can. Rather, it means that he possesses a limited goal.²¹⁴

君子之所謂知者，非能徧知人之所知之謂也；君子之所謂辯者，非能徧辯人之所辯之謂也；君子之所謂察者，非能徧察人之所察之也；有所正矣。²¹⁵

For Xunzi, there is something sages and *junzi* do not know, not because of the limitation of human ability, but because they selectively acquire knowledge.

²¹⁴ Knoblock, p. 71.

²¹⁵ Xunzi (荀子), "Ru Xiao Pian" (儒效篇), trans. Wang Zhonglin (王忠林 譯), *Xinyi Xunzi Duben* (新譯荀子讀本) Taipei: Sanmin Shuju (臺北市：三民書局), 2006, p. 90.

The constellations follow their revolutions; the sun and moon alternately shine; the four seasons succeed each other in good order; the Yin and Yang go through their great transformation; and the wind and rain spread out everywhere. Each of the myriad things must be in a harmonious relation with Heaven in order to grow, and each must obtain from Heaven the proper nurture in order to become complete. We do not perceive the process, but we perceive the result—this indeed is why we call it ‘divine.’ All realize that Heaven has brought completion, but none realize its formlessness—this indeed is why we call it ‘accomplishment of Heaven.’ Only the sage acts not seeking to know Heaven.²¹⁶

列星隨旋，日月遞炤，四時代御，陰陽大化，風雨博施，萬物各得其和以生，各得其養以成，不見其事而見其功，夫是之謂神。皆知其所以成，莫知其無形，夫是之謂天。唯聖人爲不求知天。²¹⁷

The sentence “Only the sage acts not seeking to know Nature” has two meanings.

In one of the senses, the sage does not seek to know the meaning and indication alluded by natural phenomena. For Xunzi, there are no such allusions in any natural phenomenon because nature or heaven is purposeless. Actually, the essay “A Discussion of Heaven” elucidates this view of nature.²¹⁸ A sage does not need to know how natural phenomena are brought about. He or she only needs to know how

²¹⁶ Knoblock revised, p. 15; Watson revised, p. 84.

²¹⁷ “Tian Lun Pian,” pp. 274-5.

²¹⁸ Although the naturalistic conception of Heaven in Xunzi’s philosophy is accepted by most scholars, Machle disagrees; see his Nature and Heaven in the Xunzi: A study of the Tian Lun (NY: State University of New York Press, 1993).

to make use of things in the world.²¹⁹ The pursuit of knowledge is not unconditional.

For Xunzi, knowing the true moral criteria is necessary for establishment of *li*, maintaining the social order and being a sage.²²⁰

As a general principle, the faculty of knowing belongs to the inborn nature of man. That things are knowable is a part of the natural principle of order of things. Men use their inner faculty of knowing to seek the natural principles of order, which allow things to be known. But if no boundary to the search is fixed, then even to the end of your life you will be incapable of knowing everything ... Thus, true learning inherently has a terminus to study. Where is its terminus? I say that it is at complete sufficiency. Who has such sufficiency? I say it is the sage [king]. Sageliness consists in a comprehensive grasp of the natural relationship between men. True kingship consists in a comprehensive grasp of the regulations for government... Hence, the student should take the sage king as his teacher and the regulations of the sage king as the model. By patterning himself after their example, he seeks out their guiding principles and general categories and devotes his attention to making himself into the image and imitation of these men.²²¹

凡以知人之性也，可以知物之理也。以可以知人之性，求可以知物之理，而無所疑止之，則沒世窮年不能徧也。……故學也者，固學止之也。惡乎止之？曰：止諸至足。曷謂至足？曰：聖王。聖也者，盡倫者也；王也者，盡制者也；……故學者以聖王爲師，案以聖王之制爲法，法其法，以求其統類，以務象效其人。²²²

Apart from reiterating the significance of the sage or the ideal model, Xunzi, in

²¹⁹ Xu Fuquan (徐復觀), *Zhongguo Ren Xing Lun Shi: Xian Qin Pian* (中國人性論史：先秦篇) Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian Shudian (上海：上海三聯書店), 2001, pp. 198-9.

²²⁰ Xu Fu Quan claims that, in Xunzi's thought, knowledge always aims at development in morality but not merely for the sake of knowledge itself. This results in his thought being unable to be the seed of scientific thinking, although he emphasizes the importance of experience. See, Xu Fuquan (徐復觀), *Zhongguo Ren Xing Lun Shi: Xian Qin Pian* (中國人性論史：先秦篇) Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian Shudian (上海：上海三聯書店), 2001, pp. 229-30.

²²¹ Knoblock revised, p. 110.

²²² "Jie Bi Pian," p. 358.

this passage, explicitly claims that the goal of knowing is not knowledge itself. We should know what can serve pragmatic and moral purposes:

The [officials] charged with recording the events of Heaven simply observe that its configurations can be fixed by regular periods. Those charged with recording the affairs of Earth simply observe how its suitability for crops can foster yields. Those charged with recording the events of the four seasons simply observe how their sequence can give order to the tasks of life. Those charged with recording the Yin and Yang simply observe how their harmonious interaction can bring about order.²²³

所志於天者，已其見象之可以期者矣。所志於地者，已其見宜之可以息者矣。所志於四時者，已其見數之可以事者矣。所志於陰陽者，已其見知之可以治者矣。²²⁴

The above quotation reveals a strong pragmatic tendency toward the purpose of acquiring knowledge. Xunzi's attitude toward knowledge can be summarized in his words:

In regard to the myriad things of Heaven and Earth, [*junzi*, morally superior person,] does not devote his attention to theorizing about how they came to be as they are, but rather tries to make the most perfect use of their potentialities.²²⁵

其於天地萬物也，不務說其所以然而致善用其材。²²⁶

²²³ Knoblock, p. 16.

²²⁴ "Tian Lun Pian," p. 275.

²²⁵ Knoblock revised, p. 179.

²²⁶ "Jun Dao Pian," p. 195.

Although in Xunzi's philosophy, knowledge serves other purposes and is not pursued for its own sake, his ethical thought requires him to seek for propositional knowledge about the things in the world because the truth of moral judgment is partly based on the truth of things. In this sense, propositional knowledge is essential for his moral thought. Without knowing the truth of things, people cannot grasp the *Dao* and then they cannot determine what is right, so they lose the direction and guidance of moral action. Ritual rules lose their objectivity. Learning is useless because no thing can be learnt. It is, actually, much worse than the situation in which there is no *li* because there is no sage, without whom *li* cannot be created. Thus, the truth of propositional knowledge is essential for Xunzi's moral thought.

3.6 Truth and justification

In "Contra Twelve Philosophers" (非十二子篇), Xunzi criticizes his contemporary thinkers' failure to consider all relevant and significant factors. However, although their thoughts are only based on one aspect of things, "they have reason to hold them and their thoughts are reasonable enough to deceive and mislead

the ignorant people”²²⁷ (然而其持之有故，其言之成理，足以欺惑愚眾).²²⁸ The truth of moral belief is necessary for Xunzi’s moral philosophy. We have known that, in his time, there were different claims about how to restore the social order and most of them can be supported and defended by reasons. In other words, these various thoughts are justified. However, Gettier’s examples reveal that justification can cheat us and misdirect us away from truth.²²⁹ From Xunzi’s criticism of his contemporary thinkers, we can assume that he knows this point. For him, only proving the truth of his thought can distinguish his thought from others and defeat them. Thus, it is plausible to assume that Xunzi takes the truth of belief, especially moral ones, seriously. It is also plausible to conceive that he would oppose replacing truth with justification. Although he takes a pragmatic attitude toward knowledge, this does not imply that he holds a pragmatic view of truth.

²²⁷ My translation.

²²⁸ Xunzi (荀子), “Fei Shi Er Zi Pian” (非十二子篇), trans. Wang Zhonglin (王忠林 譯), Xinyi Xunzi Duben (新譯荀子讀本) Taipei: Sanmin Shuju (臺北市：三民書局), 2006, pp. 68-9.

²²⁹ Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” Analysis 23 (1963): 121-23.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has elucidated the content of *li* and the distinctive characteristics of the sage, their relation and their role in Xunzi's moral thought. It has also considered how Xunzi's moral thought can be interpreted in terms of Railton's subjective naturalism. Under this interpretation, the Xunzian sage becomes an ideal person who is fully informed and who has perfect instrumental rationality. His or her desires and attitudes also become the basis of the truth of moral judgments. Thus, Xunzi's moral thought can be moral knowledge because it can be true.

I want to briefly to introduce some difficulties of subjective naturalism to round off the thesis, without, however, attempting to give a systematic response to all of the difficulties facing proponents of subjective naturalism. Actually, in the section 3.2.2, some difficulties of subjective naturalism were mentioned and I shall not repeat them here. I want to address myself, however to two additional difficulties. The first difficulty concerns motivation. Apparently, one's ideal self does not motivate a person to act in accordance with what his or her ideal self desires him or her to do. The self of a person is what he or she actually is, not what the ideal is or would be. Thus, subjective naturalism fails to account for the sources of moral motivation.

Secondly, since one's ideal self and one's actual self are distinct and people find it hard, to say the least, to approximate the ideal self, the ideal self cannot have first-hand experience of relevant things and actions. The accuracy of the information acquired by the ideal sage is questionable.

Although I cannot give a detail response to these difficulties, I think Xunzi's moral thought contain some helpful resources. Emphasizing learning and long-lasting effort in participating in the practice of *li* in Xunzi's moral thought may provide a method for subjective naturalism to overcome the problem of moral motivation and the lack of first-hand experience. I believe that even though Xunzi's moral thought may not solve all of the difficulties of subjective naturalism, it contains rich resources for establishing some interesting and innovative responses to claims about the weakness of subjective naturalism.

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