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Early Confucian Philosophy and the Development of Compassion

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Abstract Metaphors of adorning, crafting, water flowing downward, and growing sprouts appear in the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), the *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子), and the *Xunzi* 荀子. They express and guide thinking about what there is in human nature to cultivate and how it is to be cultivated. The craft metaphor seems to imply that our nature is of the sort that must be disciplined and reshaped to achieve goodness, while the adorning, water, and sprout metaphors imply that human nature has an inbuilt directionality toward the ethical that should be protected or nurtured. I argue that all the metaphors capture different aspects of human nature and how one must work with these aspects. There is much in contemporary psychology and neuroscience to suggest that the early Confucians were on the right track. It is also argued that they point to a fruitful conception of ethical development that is relational and holistic.

Keywords Moral cultivation · Human nature · Compassion · Confucianism

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1 Introduction

My subject is moral cultivation as conceived in the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), the *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子), and the *Xunzi* 荀子.[1] These texts provide distinct approaches to a set of common problems concerning cultivation. Comparing the approaches, I believe, sheds light not only on how the early Confucian tradition evolved in its approach to cultivation, but also on the process of cultivation itself. In addressing the latter topic, I will bring some psychological and neuroscientific studies into dialogue with the Chinese texts. I look at the metaphors for cultivation used in these texts with special attention to the issue of what sort of motivational stuff or material human beings have to work with as they attempt to cultivate moral excellence in themselves. In each of these texts the nature of self-cultivation is presented in different and apparently incompatible ways by distinct metaphors.

The *Analects* presents the metaphor of self-cultivation as the adorning or refining of a background that is already given. It also presents a craft metaphor of carving and polishing bone, cutting and grinding jade to make something fine. The different implications of these metaphors, I will suggest, presage the way that the *Mencius* and *Xunzi* take different directions in conceiving how self-cultivation works with the basic stuff that human beings start with. The latter texts provide a level of theorization about the character and origin of this basic stuff that is not present in the *Analects*, but the *Analects* provides vivid and concrete exemplification of the way that moral cultivation should be a relational and collaborative process. In the end, I shall argue, the differences between the metaphors do not represent mistakes or simple confusion about moral cultivation. They rather reflect difficulties we encounter to this day in trying to understand how we develop morally: first, the difficulty of properly conceptualizing what is innate to human beings; and second, the diverse and complex nature of the basic stuff that we do have from the beginning. I shall argue that reflection on the approaches to moral cultivation in the three texts can help prevent an oversimplification of the process of moral development. Each metaphor, I shall argue, contributes to our understanding and in fact does not necessarily compete if we recognize the complex nature of moral development. In this first section, I shall focus on the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, and conclude by discussing the development of compassion from a Mencian perspective. In the second section, I bring Xunzi more fully into the dialogue over moral cultivation and discuss the way that the different conceptions of moral development embedded in the three texts can fruitfully be brought to bear on the development of compassion.

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2 How Early Confucian Philosophy Helps Us Think about the Nature and Nurture of Moral Development

2.1 Adornment and Craft in the *Analects*

The *Analects* gives its readers glimpses into the lives of men who aspired to public office or to influence those already in office. They believed that the decline of legitimate political and social order could only be reversed through a moral restoration of the character of rulers and of those who served them. Therefore their project of redeeming the country was intertwined with striving to cultivate the self in accord with an individual moral ideal, the ideal of the *junzi* 君子 or the exemplary person (using the translation from Ames and Rosemont 1998, hereafter abbreviated as "AR"). The text features Confucius and his students trying to understand and to articulate what moral cultivation involves *as they engage in it*.

Confucius and his students discuss the nature of *ren* 仁 and how to realize it in their persons. *Ren* is identified with the exemplary person's comprehensive moral excellence (*Analects* 4.5) and is associated with many particular virtues such as deference, tolerance, making good on one's word, diligence, and generosity (*Analects* 17.6; AR 304), loving others (*Analects* 12.22; AR 160), observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮) (*Analects* 12.1, 3.3; AR 152, 82), establishing others in seeking to establish oneself and promoting others in seeking to get there oneself (*Analects* 6.30; AR 110). A key dimension of *ren* is an affective attitude of concern and respect, and it is perhaps the dimension that runs through and unifies the different particular virtues associated with *ren.*

Much of the Confucian work in moral cultivation, then, involves working with one's emotions. The centrality of emotion to Confucian ethics is one of the main reasons why contemporary moral philosophers across a wide range of traditions and philosophical approaches are and should be interested in studying the *Analects*. In particular, much recent empirical and theoretical work in psychology emphasizes the power of emotion over judgment and action, and one of the great points of interest in Confucianism is its assumption that one can train one's emotions. Much of this training is attempted through observing ritual propriety. The relevant rituals included ceremonies of ritual sacrifice to ancestors, the burial of parents, the customs governing respectful and appropriate behavior between living parents and children, the rituals of court in how one interacts with others of various ranks, and one's demeanor at taking meals and in greeting others in the course of going about one's affairs. These rituals are ways to express respect and concern and therefore stand in close relationship to the very affective attitudes that are crucial to moral cultivation. Just what that relationship is, however, is a matter of interpretation.

In 3.8, Zixia 子夏, prompted by Confucius, implies that observing ritual propriety comes after in a way comparable to applying color comes after one has something plain to be adorned (AR 84; see also *Analects* 3.3–4). Or consider 6.18: "When one's basic disposition (*zhi* 質) overwhelms refinement (*wen* 文), the person is boorish; when refinement overwhelms one's basic disposition, the person is an officious scribe. It is only when one's basic disposition and refinement are in appropriate balance that you have the exemplary person" (AR 107–108). Such passages express what we might call the "adornment" metaphor (Slingerland 2003). According to this metaphor, observing ritual propriety presupposes that one has some basic stuff that does not need substantial alteration but rather refinement and appropriate expression.

The craft metaphor occurs mainly in connection with the idea that observing ritual is necessary for restraining and reshaping the self, implying that the basic stuff must be transformed in major ways and not just adorned. In *Analects* 1.15, cultivation is portrayed through a quotation from the *Book of Odes*: "Like bone carved and polished, / Like jade cut and ground." The self is carved and polished, cut and ground, and in significant part this is done through the proper observance of ritual. When asked about *ren* in *Analects* 12.1, the Master replies, "Through self-discipline and observing ritual propriety one becomes *ren*. If for the space of one day one were able to accomplish this, the whole empire would defer to *ren*" (with modification from AR 152). The language of discipline or restraint is striking. What must be disciplined or restrained in us is different from what merely needs adorning.

To consider what the different metaphors might imply for the relation between observing ritual propriety on the one hand, and the realization of *ren* as comprehensive moral excellence, we must note some features of rituals as conceived in the *Analects*. Rituals give us a "form" for expressing the "content" of respect and concern. The form consists of physical gestures, postures, patterns of conduct, and uttered words that are established by custom and convention to signify the affective content. In rote, mechanical performance of ritual, the performer "goes through the motions" but lacks the affective attitudes the form is supposed to signify.[2] A conception of which attitudes a ritual should be expressing seems to be the basis in *Analects* 9.3 for Confucius' decisions about which ritual forms to accept and which to reject. He accepts the current deviation from tradition that allows one to wear the less expensive silk ceremonial cap instead of a hemp cap, but rejects one allowing one to bow only after ascending the steps of the ancestral hall to greet one's superior. In rejecting the traditional form of bowing before one has ascended the hall, one conveys hubris. An implication of *Analects* 9.3 is that the form of a ritual can align or misalign with the content it was meant to express.[3]

In such passages, the form of ritual seems secondary to the content of the affective attitude it is meant to signify. A passage that confirms this is *Analects* 3.3: "What has a person who is not *ren* got to do with observing ritual propriety?" The implication is that one has the basic stuff and ritual serves to communicate it. If the form of the ritual is well matched to the affective attitude one should be having and if one is having it, then one "adorns" the attitude through giving it clear and vivid expression. One further adorns one's affective attitude if the ritual is performed in a graceful and spontaneous fashion, a melding of form and content that becomes second nature to the performer through assiduous and repeated performance.[4]

[2] Concern that ritual performance be emotionally contentful is expressed in *Analects* 3.12: "The expression 'sacrifice as though present' is taken to mean 'sacrifice to the spirits as though the spirits are present.' But the Master said, 'If I myself do not participate in the sacrifice, it is though I have not sacrificed at all'" (AR 85). This passage makes the most sense if participating in the sacrifice is construed as emotional "presence" to the affective content of the ceremony—the emotions of gratitude and respect toward one's ancestors, for example.

[3] Taking a physical posture that is below another has a natural meaning of submission among various species of mammals (e.g., crouching by nonhuman primates and dogs and cats). Humans might have built on a genetically-based behavior and turned it into a signal of deference to authority. By the same token, taking a posture in bowing that puts oneself on the same level as the superior, especially in comparison to the traditional form, can signal a rejection of deference. In the *Analects* this rejection is taken to reflect an erosion of respect for legitimate authority.

[4] See Sarkissian 2010a for a fruitful discussion of how something like this might become second nature, using de Sousa's concept of a paradigm scenario and Damasio's concept of a somatic marker.

The craft metaphor, on the other hand, implies a different kind of relation between observing ritual propriety and the achievement of moral excellence. It implies that observing ritual propriety has a disciplining effect that is crucial for promoting moral excellence. That moral cultivation requires a serious reshaping of the stuff we begin with is supported by passages such as *Analects* 9.18, where the Master says, "I have yet to meet a person who is fonder of excellence (*de* 德) than of physical beauty" (AR 130). Zai Wo 宰我 is the student who most clearly exemplifies what is recalcitrant to moral cultivation in the stuff human beings have to begin with. When Confucius observes Zai Wo sleeping in the daytime, he says, "You cannot carve rotten wood, and cannot trowel over a wall of manure. As for Zai Wo, what is the point in upbraiding him?" (*Analects* 5.10; AR 97) Another set of passages indicates the presence of a widespread tendency that stands in the way of moral cultivation. The Master emphasizes several times that an exemplary person does not worry about being acknowledged by others but rather being worthy of being acknowledged (*Analects* 1.1, 1.3, 4.14), and that in striving to become such a person one should strive for the same priority of concern. The plausible implication of such emphasis, of course, is that most people tend to slide into the reverse priority: if one must choose between "being" and "seeming," we go for seeming to get the approval and reward that is properly merited by "being."

In the light of such passages, then, it seems plausible that the stuff human beings begin with is in need of re-formation and not just adornment. *Analects* 12.1 implies that observing ritual propriety is crucial to this process. Yet it is not clear how assiduous observation of rituals will endow one with the concern and respect that is meant to be signified if one does not already have something like these attitudes. In light of this difficulty, one then might be tempted to revert to the adornment metaphor. If one cannot manufacture the basic stuff of concern and respect through assiduous performance of ritual, one must already have it, and it needs only to be adorned and refined through ritual. The problem is that there is a good reason for the craft metaphor. Though most of us might not be as bad off as Zai Wo in the department of moral motivation, we do stand in need of more substantial change than adorning and refining the stuff of concern and respect that we already have. David Nivison pointed out something like this problem in his seminal paper "The Paradox of Virtue" (Nivison 1996a).

Slingerland takes the tension between the adornment and craft metaphors in the *Analects* to be unresolvable (Slingerland 2003).[5] I believe there are ways to resolve it that in fact help us shed light on the nature of moral cultivation. The mixed nature of human emotional stuff makes it likely that some emotions will be

[5] In his rich and provocative book, Slingerland identifies several sources for the tension between two conceptions of moral cultivation in Confucian texts. Besides the apparent difference between adornment and craft metaphors, and the related "paradox of virtue" to which Nivison pointed, there is also a tension between the ideal of *wuwei* 無為 (which Slingerland translates as "effortless action") (see *Analects* 15.5) and the conception of moral cultivation as an arduous process of self-discipline in which one is constantly vigilant about the slightest feelings and impulses that are not in accord with moral excellence (Slingerland 2003). I think there are more possibilities for reconciling these two themes about cultivation, and will discuss them in the second section.

of the sort that a sincere practitioner can and should bring to his or her performance of ritual and that others will need to be curbed, restrained or redirected from harmful expression. The stuff that one might be able to bring to the performance of ritual and that might undergo refinement and be adorned through clarity and grace of expression in the performance is some natural emotion corresponding to concern or respect. On the other hand, the stuff that needs restraint and discipline includes desires for social admiration and material reward, which can be gratified by "seeming" rather than "being." The tension between the adornment and craft metaphors is irreconcilable only if one takes one or the other to represent the entire process of moral cultivation; that is, only if one takes human motivational stuff to be of only one kind—the kind that needs mere refinement and adorning or the kind that needs major reshaping.

In the next section, I discuss how Mencius works from a metaphor that in some respects is like the adornment metaphor but is also different and points to another dimension of moral cultivation that is not fully captured either by the adornment or the craft metaphors. Moreover, he addresses theoretical issues about where the stuff comes from.

2.2 Mencius and His Metaphors of Flowing Water and Sprouts

In *Analects* 5.13, Zigong 子貢 said that Confucius did not discourse on our nature (*xing* 性). It is not surprising that Mencius would seek to fill this theoretical vacuum, not just as part of his argumentative response to Confucianism's philosophical rivals, but more importantly to get a clearer idea of how moral cultivation should proceed given the character of the raw material.

In *Mencius* 6A1, Mencius and Gaozi 告子 exchange metaphors to articulate their conceptions of *renxing* 人性, commonly translated as "human nature," and its relation to moral cultivation. I shall translate the phrase that way here, with the caution that I am adopting a nuanced gloss that Shun Kwong-loi has suggested: "Certain characteristic features of human beings that are particularly conspicuous, pervasive, and difficult to alter, without necessarily having the connotation of what is essential as opposed to accidental" (Shun 1997: 185). I adopt this characterization because, with Roger Ames, I believe that the Chinese tendency to see things in relational and dynamic terms is not congenial to thinking of things as having essential properties (Ames 1991, 2002).

In *Mencius* 6A2 Gaozi proposes that human nature is like swirling water. Make an opening on the eastern side, and it flows east. Make an opening on the western wide, and it flows west. That is, human nature has no inherent direction either toward the ethical or away from it. Mencius counters that water does have a tendency to flow downward, and it is this tendency that is like tendencies toward ethical that is given to human beings by *tian* 天, the ordering force in the world. The water-flowing-downward metaphor brings out several important implications for Mencius' conception of human nature and the way it grounds the process of moral cultivation. First, it imparts a dynamic quality to human nature by characterizing it in terms of direction of movement, of change; second, this direction is toward the ethical. Mencius also suggests an explanation for why people do not always act on their tendencies to ethical

growth. Just as water can be forced upward by splashing it or damming it up, so human nature can be channeled away from goodness. The positive side is that, absent the abnormal situation of the "damming up" or "splashing" of growth away from virtue, people will become ethically virtuous. Ethical virtue is not always realized, but is natural in that it normally gets realized. In fact the basic idea expressed in this metaphor seems comparable to the contemporary "dispositional" analysis of the innate given by philosophers such as Stephen Stich and Elliot Sober—roughly to the effect that a trait is innate if and only if it appears in the normal course of development as part of the typical phenotype of that kind of organism (Stich 1975; Sober 1998).

However, another metaphor suggests a different conception of the innate, one I think is ultimately more productive for thinking about moral cultivation. *Duan* 端 is translatable as "beginning," "germ," or "sprout," and is used in *Mencius* 2A6 to refer to the four *xin* 心 (hearts or feelings) that develop into ethical virtues: compassion grows into *ren* 仁 (human-heartedness); dislike/shame grows into *yi* 義 (rightness as applied to actions, righteousness as applied to persons); deference grows into *li* 禮 (observing ritual propriety); and approval/disapproval grows into *zhi* 智 (wisdom). Mencius makes the horticultural metaphor quite explicit:

> Mencius said, "In years of abundance, most of the young people have the wherewithal to be good, while in years of adversity, most of them become violent. This is not a matter of difference in the native capacities sent down by Heaven but rather of what overwhelms the minds.
>
> Now, let barley be sown and covered with earth; the ground being the same, and the time of planting also the same, it grows rapidly, and in due course of time, it all ripens. Though there may be differences in the yield, this is because the fertility of the soil, the nourishment of the rain and the dew, and the human effort invested are not the same." (*Mencius* 6A7; trans. Bloom 2009: 124)

Unlike the water metaphor, the sprout metaphor accords a crucial positive role for environmental factors. Sprouts need fertile soil and adequate sun and water. In 1A7, Mencius explicitly holds the king responsible for providing material security to his subjects and in other places puts forward some fairly specific taxation, agricultural, and military policy proposals for accomplishing this (e.g., *Mencius* 2A5, 3A3). Furthermore, Mencius places responsibility on people to cultivate their own sprouts. One who nurtures the smaller part of the self becomes a small person, while one who nurtures the greater part of the self becomes a great person (*Mencius* 6A14). People who are always eating and drinking are considered by others to nurture what is small. Nurturing the greater part of oneself is accomplished when *xin* 心, the heart-mind (the seat of thinking, feeling, and intending), *si*'s 思 (thinks, reflects, focuses attention, or turns over in one's mind) (*Mencius* 6A15). Reflecting, says Mencius, the heart-mind will get it; not reflecting, the heart-mind will not get it. *Mencius* 6A7 suggests that *li* 理 (pattern, order) and *yi* 義 (righteousness) please our hearts

just as meat pleases our mouths. In contemporary terms, the pleasure we take in reflecting on order and righteousness, especially as we ponder them as realized in our own actions, may result in a "feedback loop mechanism": as we act on our sprouts and reflect on what we have done, we take pleasure, and this motivates further action to nurture the sprouts. This mechanism helps to explain why in 2A6 Mencius describes knowing how to fill out the sprouts as like a fire starting up or a spring breaking through a hole in the ground.

Note how far these characterizations of the nurturing conditions for the sprouts depart from the idea of "normal" or "default" development of the ethical stuff in human nature. Poverty, war, and lack of reflection on manifestations of the sprouts surely were not "abnormal" in terms of statistical frequency of occurrence, and yet these are very plausibly necessary conditions for growth of the sprouts. In contemporary terms, Mencius had insight into the interaction between nature and nurture, at least when he is using the sprout metaphor.[6]

The difference between the adornment and craft metaphors in the *Analects* is not quite the same as the difference between the water and sprout metaphors in the *Mencius*. They do mark similar contrasts along a spectrum of conceptions of how much work needs to be done on the basic human stuff in order to achieve moral excellence. According to the adornment metaphor of the *Analects*, one need not make major alterations to the stuff. The water metaphor in the *Mencius* holds that the motivational stuff simply should not be interfered with, and it will come to full ethical realization. Both metaphors imply that we basically have the stuff we need to succeed in moral cultivation. The main difference between them is that the water metaphor highlights the dynamic nature of the motivational stuff we begin with.

The sprout metaphor also suggests dynamism toward the ethical, but realization is highly contingent: more needs to be done "pro-actively" to foster growth in the ethical direction: not only must the right environmental conditions be in place mainly through the agency of others, but the possessor of the sprouts must put effort into cultivating them. These connotations of pro-activity and contingency make the sprout metaphor closer to the craft metaphor, but the sprout metaphor is different in suggesting that the basic direction of ethical growth is given at the beginning, just as the basic direction of a plant's growth is somehow embedded in the sprout: a barley sprout cannot grow into a corn plant. The craft metaphor suggests no such directionality embedded in the stuff.

Let me temporarily set aside the craft metaphor and focus on the water and sprout metaphors. The sprout metaphor arguably is more plausible than the water metaphor simply because the realization of moral excellence *does seem* a lot more contingent than water flowing downward. This fact might seem so evident that we could wonder why the water metaphor is present in the text. The different implications of the two metaphors seem not to have been clearly

[6] The parable of the trees of Ox Mountain in *Mencius* 6A8 suggests that the sprouts can be so starved and abused that they not only die off but also seem that they were never there in the first place. The implication is that the continued presence of the sprouts in a person depends on an environment that is "good enough" to sustain them.

identified in such a way so as to make it apparent that a choice had to be made between them.[7] Why not?

Looking to ourselves might provide clues. Consider our concept of the "normal" and the various meanings we attach to it: not deviating from a norm or expectation; commonly occurring, statistically average in frequency of occurrence. In our talk about what is normal, it is very easy to slide back and forth between what ought to be and what frequently is. Indeed, one sense of "ought" in English is the "ought" of expectation that sits right in the middle of this ambiguity between "ought" and "is": "The train ought to be here in 10 minutes," we might say, based on the schedule for its arrival at this station or perhaps based on our experience of its punctuality. We might say this in a predictive mood, and so if the train arrives late we will regard ourselves as being wrong, but we might say this in a normative mood, and this might be revealed by our saying, "They really should do a better job of keeping the trains on schedule." Often we don't know what kind of mood we're in until the train arrives late.

This kind of ambiguity, indeed, is to be expected given the human tendency to explain why and how things happen along the model of human agency. Things display regularities of behavior, and we are inclined to think of them following certain norms. We have a strong tendency to think of the norms as normative for the behavior of things (even when the things aren't being operated by human beings) in addition to or rather than as descriptive norms. And to return to Mengzi's metaphor of water flowing downward, water flows downward because *tian* imparts order to the world (whether we conceive of *tian* as a transcendent deity or immanent force). Its flow downward is "normal" in that way that merges the normative and the descriptive. Thus insofar as we conceive of water's directionality as normative and not just descriptive, the implications of the water metaphor get merged with those of the sprout metaphor. If a sprout is

[7] However, there is no denying that sometimes ethical development is characterized in ways more consistent with the water metaphor and with the corresponding dispositional model of human nature as containing directional tendencies that are realized in the absence of interference. In *Mencius* 4B19, the superior person is said to *preserve* that which distinguishes human beings from the birds and beasts. *Mencius* 4B28 portrays superior people as *preserving* their hearts. In 6A6 the hearts of compassion, shame/dislike, deference, and approval/disapproval are identified outright *with the virtues* rather than with the sprouts of the virtues as in 2A6. He says these *virtues* are not infused in us from the outside, but are rather *already in us*. 6A10 describes the worthy person as one who is able not to *lose* the heart that everyone shares. 6A11 describes being unethical as a matter of *losing* one's heart and learning as a matter of seeking the lost heart. This language of the virtues already being within us, of preserving, not losing, and seeking the lost heart is language that de-emphasizes the contingency of development and the interaction of nature and nurture.

In the 6A1–6 debate with Gaozi, Mencius (or sometimes his surrogate in responding to Gaozi's surrogate) defends the position that *yi* or appropriateness is internal (*nei* 內) to the one who acts appropriately rather than lying outside (*wai* 外) that person. Such a position is compatible with the implications of the water metaphor. The sprout metaphor, on the other hand, weighs against locating virtue on one side of such a simple dichotomy but rather the interaction between the "inside" and the "outside" of a person. That the simplified language of inside versus outside is inadequate to what Mencius often sees in the process of moral cultivation is reflected by a position taken by the Mencian surrogate in 6A5: that the object of respect can vary according to the circumstance, even though the respect itself comes from inside. That is, one ordinarily respects one's uncle more than one's younger brother, but if he is impersonating the deceased at a sacrifice, one respects him more. One ordinarily respects one's older brother more than an elder villager, but in the context of the village drinking ceremony, one respects the elder villager more. As SHUN Kwong-loi puts it, "the responses stemming from the relevant predispositions of the heart/mind are themselves sensitive to external circumstances" (Shun 1997: 109). This is a coherent position, but ill-described by saying that respect is coming purely from the inside.

nurtured in the way it *should* be, if its development is "normal" in *that* sense, its development is not unlike the flow of water downward.[8]

However, the sprout metaphor separates from the water metaphor if we are confronted with the actual frequency of divergence from the conditions for moral development. The proper nurturance that the sprouts need is often not forthcoming. The descriptive sense (what can be expected to develop as a matter of frequency of occurrence) pulls away from the normative sense (what develops if the proper conditions are put in place). Mencius had to confront increasing divergence of this kind during the Warring States period, when he struggled without much success to persuade kings to nurture the beginnings of morality in themselves and in their people.

We can continue to be confused in our thinking about the innate *even if we confine ourselves to purely descriptive notions*. Organisms do have traits that develop across a wide range of environments, and we might conclude that it is an intrinsic part of their "nature" to develop these traits regardless of wide variation in environmental conditions. The appearance of such traits is so striking that we might come to associate "developmental fixity," or relative immunity to environmental influence, as a defining feature of what it is to be innate. Fixity gets bundled together with other features in the vernacular concept of the innate, such as being unlearned, present at birth, and typical or characteristic of the species. The way that Xunzi criticizes Mencius in his *Xing E* 性惡 ([Human] Nature is Bad) chapter is consistent with this bundling together of features. Xunzi objects to Mencius' claim that because human beings can learn, their nature is good. This saying reveals, he asserts, that Mencius has no understanding of the difference between what is inborn nature and what is acquired. What is inborn includes what is spontaneous, what cannot be learned, and what requires no application to master (Knoblock1988–1994, hereafter designated by "K", 23.1c, [3] 152).

It is now increasingly recognized, however, that these various features are not always found together, and that it is fallacious to infer from something's being unlearned, for example, that it is developmentally fixed (Griffiths 2002). What is unlearned, in fact, might be a tendency to develop (including a tendency to learn) in certain directions within a range of environmental influences. What is natural might be the susceptibility to being nurtured in certain directions given this range of influences. Moreover, imperviousness to environmental influence is an illusion. Mallard ducks respond to the "assembly call" (coming when called) that their mothers vocalize. They do this over a wide range of environments—in woods, incubators, and even with chicken foster parents. For this reason, one

[8] Joshua Knobe and Richard Samuels have described some findings consistent with the suggestion here that people tend to regard as innate a trait that develops under conditions that should (in the normative sense) be realized. In one study participants were given no information about the nature of the trait itself (just identified as trait X in other words) but simply told about genetic and environmental factors that caused the trait to arise. People showed more inclination to regard the trait as innate when the environmental factors were morally good (i.e., when parents treat a child decently) than when they were morally bad (i.e., when parents treat a child badly). Knobe and Samuels also gave participants both the decent treatment and the bad treatment cases at the same time and asked whether the difference between the cases was relevant to whether the trait was innate. They were also asked to rate their agreement with a statement about the trait's innateness in each case and to explain why the difference between the two cases either was or was not relevant to the question of innateness. When prompted to reflect on the cases in this manner, participants tended to conclude that the moral difference was not relevant to the innateness of the trait. Knobe and Samuels conclude from this and other studies that moral judgments tend to influence our intuitive judgments about the innateness of traits but that when we are prompted to engage in principled reflection on the role of moral judgments, we are capable of correcting for their influence (Knobe and Samuels 2013).

might think that they have an innate program ensuring a response to the mother's call in any circumstance. However, it turns out that exposure to the sound of the mother's call *before being hatched* is the environmental factor that prompts development of a preference for her call over that of, say, a chicken foster parent (Gottleib 1991). The illusion of imperviousness to environmental influence can be replaced by the notion of "canalization" (Moore 2003). Highly canalized traits develop in many different environments such that the developmental pathways leading to such traits are like very deep trenches that strongly discourage but nevertheless allow in unusual circumstances deviation from those pathways. In contrast, less canalized traits develop through traveling down relatively shallow pathways and therefore seem to be more sensitive to the organisms' developmental environments.

The ethical virtues, to the extent that they are relatively less canalized traits, are better pictured through the sprout metaphor. However, a virtue of the notion of canalization is that it can be used to account for traits that inspire use of the water metaphor. These are traits that are simply more canalized and so may appear to develop given "normal" circumstances. In fact, we can re-conceive relatively more canalized traits in terms of the sprout metaphor, since there are kinds of plants that are very hardy and grow under a wide range of environmental conditions. Ones that are undesirable and difficult to get rid of are "weeds." The question about the sprouts of human goodness, then, is where on such a continuum they lie, and ultimately this seems to be an empirical matter. My best guess is that Mencius was much closer to the target in using the sprout metaphor, and a moral sprout is certainly not that of a weed, but of a plant that needs for its development deliberate and sustained nurture from others and the self, and other favorable conditions that are not extremely rare but not common either.

Associated with the idea of canalization is the idea that natural selection operates on both genes and environments that are necessary for the development of adaptive traits. If we inherit traits from our parents, we inherit both genes and environments. The implication of such a seemingly simple insight is that the causal contributions of genetic versus environmental factors cannot be isolated as proportional contributions to developed traits (Lewontin 1974). Mencius did not know about natural selection, but especially when using the sprout metaphor, he acknowledges that development comes from an interactive blend of things we are given and do not learn (*Mencius* 7A15) and things that we learn and acquire from the environment.

The sprout metaphor, in fact, is a particularly apt metaphor for conceiving of one way such interaction might take place. The unlearned dispositions constitute a direction of potential growth, but only if the nurturing conditions are in place. There are some general tendencies of early Chinese thought that might have supported use of the sprout metaphor. One such tendency, which Roger Ames cites, is the importance attached to change and becoming, as opposed to stasis and being, in the early Chinese conception of the world (Ames 2002). I would suggest that also relevant is the tendency in early Chinese thought to view things holistically, to understand things by virtue of what they are related to or by their context. To understand how a human being comes to be as she is or how she could be something other than she is now, we must understand that process as relational. The holistic approach contrasts with the analytic approach of trying to understand something by breaking it down into its component parts, by looking inside the thing rather than relating it to others. I do not think that early Chinese thought is exclusively holistic in approach any more than Western thought is

exclusively analytic, but there may be differences in the extent to which thinkers in different traditions readily and as first resort turn to these approaches.[9]

There is reason to think that the classical Chinese texts discussed in this section might reflect broad and important cultural differences in cognitive styles. Richard Shweder and Edmund Bourne observed in their influential 1982 study that residents of Orissa, India tended to use more context-specific descriptions of persons such as "She brings cakes on festival days," in comparison with Chicago college students who tended to use more context-insensitive terms such as "friendly" (Shweder and Bourne 1982). Richard Nisbett and his colleagues have found similar and related differences between East Asians and Westerners, and have claimed that East Asians are more inclined to employ a relational and holistic approach to understanding things, while Westerners are more inclined to employ an analytic approach (see Choi, Nisbett, and Naranzayan 1999; Nisbett 2004). There may be deeply rooted reasons why the sprout metaphor appears in a Chinese text, and what is of additional great interest is the fact that some recent Western science is pointing us in a direction where such a metaphor seems highly salient. There may be a good reason, then, to bring early Chinese thought into dialogue with recent science.

2.3 Nurturing the Sprout of Compassion

Let me briefly pursue this line of thought with compassion. In 2A6, Mencius describes a manifestation of the sprout of compassion (*ceyin zhi xin* 惻隱之心) that if developed becomes *ren* as human-heartedness: the alarm and distress one would feel upon seeing a child about to fall into a well. The example is compelling because it corresponds to a widespread and powerful protective instinct that human beings have toward their young. Mencius is of course well known for his view that the caring that seems to be at the core of his conception of *ren* begins with family. The way to become a true king, Mencius tells King Xuan 宣 in 1A7, is to take these primal feelings and extend or grow them so that they are directed toward others outside the family.

We may have recently come to better understand the brain chemistry underlying these feelings. Increase in the levels of neurohormones oxytocin and vasopressin are associated with such love and attachment. Studies of animals, for example, have established that oxytocin facilitates attachment to offspring, and in monogamous mammals, cohabiting sexual partners, and same-sex conspecifics (Zak 2008). Other studies have shown that oxytocin facilitates a temporary attachment between strangers, increasing trust, reciprocity, and generosity (Zak 2005; Zak, Kurzban, and Matzner 2005; Morhenn et al. 2008).[10] Anonymous charitable giving based on ethical beliefs corresponds to activation of reward systems in fronto-limbic brain networks that are also activated by food, sex, drugs, and

[9] Interestingly, Willis Overton, writing on the nature/nurture controversy in psychology, suggests that there are two fundamentally different approaches to the question: one that stresses the interactive relation between genes and environment; and one that construes the contributions as isolable and additive. The former is associated with an "organismic" (roughly, corresponding to what I have called "holistic") paradigm and the latter is associated with an "analytic" paradigm (Overton 1973).

[10] While such results are very promising, oxytocin does not always have such positive effects. It does not increase trust, for example, if the potentially trusted other is portrayed as untrustworthy, is unknown, or a member of an out-group when out-group threat is high (Henrichs, von Dawans, and Domes 2009; Macdonald and Macdonald 2010). See also Bartz, Zaki, Bolger, and Ochsner 2011 for the proposal that the variable effects of these neurohormones are best explained by an interactionist approach in which their effects are modified by situational features and/or differences among individuals.

money. Such giving is also linked to networks that control the release of oxytocin and vasopressin. One speculation emerging from a study led by the neuroscientist Jorge Moll is that the physical and psychological processes that underlie family love might also be recruited via internalization of cultural norms on behalf of caring for strangers and promoting social causes (Moll et al. 2006).[11] This seems something like a Mencian extension of feelings that are most strongly and spontaneously felt toward family, an interaction between biology and culture. The fact that our brain chemistry rewards us for acting on these feelings corresponds to Mencius' claim that growing the sprouts is an accelerating process like a fire starting up or a spring breaking through.

The neuroscience, however, does not give a phenomenological picture of how this extension might take place on the psychological level. In 1A7, Mencius reminds King Xuan of a past incident in which the king spared an ox being led to ritual slaughter. The king professes some uncertainty as to what his motives were, but is persuaded by Mencius that he was moved by compassion for the ox. It reminded him, the king recalls, of an innocent man going to execution. Mencius concludes that the king does not bring peace to his people not because of any inability to act but because of a simple failure to act. All the king has to do, Mencius explains, is to take this mind of compassion that he has applied to the ox and apply it to his own people.

There has been quite a bit of debate over the question of how Mencius conceived of the process of extension. Much of the debate is fueled by the ambiguities between the water and the sprout metaphors. Those who focus on the water metaphor and passages most consistent with it will have justification for proposing that Mencius, in his intervention with the king, is simply prompting the king to apply to his people emotional capacities for compassion he already has or could easily have (perhaps with a bit of prompting) (e.g., Im 1999). On the other hand, those who focus on the sprout metaphor will be more inclined to see the development of the beginnings of morality in human nature as highly contingent and in need of pro-active nurture (e.g., Wong 1991, 2002). The passage itself does not provide direct evidence on this question. It is more of a stimulus for thinking about what a psychologically realistic picture of Mencian extension would look like. I have proposed an interpretation I call "developmental extension" which involves significant alteration, expansion, or refinement of emotional capacities (Wong 1991, 2002). In *Mencius* 1A7, I believe that Mencius presented the suffering of his people to King Xuan as a reason for him to feel compassion for them, but the way Mencius presented that reason is crucial. He reminds the king of an occasion on which he did feel compassion. The king recalls looking at the ox and likening its trembling to that of an innocent man being led to execution. The king is reliving that past event. Mencius thus not only presents the king a reason to feel compassion for his people but also activates the king's compassion by getting him to recall why he spared the ox. It is the combination of these acts—referring to an appropriate object of the king's compassion toward which he has yet to demonstrate sufficient compassion and evoking compassion through getting him to remember what it felt like to have it—that is more likely to enlarge the king's compassion. Learning can steer and enlarge untutored

[11] In referring to Moll and his colleagues' proposal, I do not mean to suggest that all primal compassionate impulses are directed only toward family, but it seems plausible to me that the causal explanation for why they exist in the first place has a lot to do with their role in undergirding the activities of mating and reproduction and that in their untutored state they occur more frequently and strongly in expression toward family. It also seems plausible to me that cultural norms play a major role in expanding and rendering more consistent the expression of compassionate impulses toward nonkin and strangers.

compassion so that it encompasses more of what it should encompass; but at the same time, the learning would not be effective in guiding action if it were not associated with the pre-existing directions of untutored compassion.

In 2A2, Mencius draws a picture of moral action as the heart-mind's directing the vital energies of the body, *qi* 氣. In 2A2's terms, Menicus tries to get the king to reflect in an emotionally active way on a particular manifestation of his sprouts—his compassion for and sparing of the ox. Because the heart-mind can reflect upon the reasons one has for doing things and can form priorities that place the "greater parts" over the "lesser parts" of one's person, it can direct the vital energies of the body, but it cannot "force" the *qi* in a direction that it has no inclination whatsoever to go toward. The heart-mind "aims" the energy of feeling that is constituted by *qi*, but on the other hand, its aim would accomplish no movement were it not for some pre-existing directionality in the energies of the *qi*. This, I believe, is the point of the story of the man from Song 宋 in *Mencius* 2A2 who "helped" his sprouts to grow by pulling on them and wound up killing them. These might be philosophers who try to guide ethical development primarily through reflection, reasoning, and doctrines, without regard to the directions of *qi*. On the other hand, Mencius notes that there are people who do not try to help growth of the sprouts at all; significantly, he pictures them not "weeding" their sprouts, perhaps alluding to natural desires for sensual gratification. This last image suggests that ethical learning helps to steer feelings consistent with at least some of the natural directions of the *qi*. This strengthens the ethical sprouts in relation to the "weeds" of sensual desire. What I hoped I have given is more of a phenomenological picture of how the given and unlearned interacts with learning in moral cultivation; how learning appropriately channels the given and unlearned.

There is a striking resonance with this picture from some recent psychological theorizing on empathy and ethical development. The psychologist Martin Hoffman has suggested that a child begins to internalize morality when she experiences empathic distress upon witnessing another person's distress. The earliest modes of empathic arousal are primitive, automatic, and involuntary processes. Hoffman thinks that the most effective child-rearing takes advantage of occasions when primitive empathy is aroused and used in moral teaching. A child hurts another, for example, and an adult might arouse empathy in the perpetrator by pointing out the effect on the victim, expressing disapproval, and suggesting apology or reparation. When such a sequence is repeated many times, "scripts" are created and encoded in memory so that they influence later decisions and behavior. It is important that the kind of induction that presents moral reasons to the child be given in an emotionally evocative situation so that the cognition of what the child is being taught can be made "hot" by the activation of affective and motivational proclivities and through the linking of the proclivities to the reasons. Hoffman goes on to suggest that moral norms or principles can acquire their motivational efficacy through association with activated affective and motivational proclivities. At the same time, the norms or principles, by getting linked to the proclivities, can correct certain biases that accompany the untutored proclivities, such as the greater tendency to ignore the distress of those persons who are unfamiliar to us or to forget the distress of those who are not present to us here and now (Hoffman 2000).

In Mencian terms, the primal empathic proclivities to which Hoffman points are part of the sprout of compassion. The neurological bases of these proclivities may include the release of oxytocin and vasopressin, as mentioned earlier. The sort of teaching that parents do with their children in the context of activated empathy for another who is suffering corresponds to the sort of teaching I believe Mencius was trying to do with the

king upon reminding him of his compassion for the ox. Mencius is trying to embed the norm of what a true king does for his people in the king's emotional proclivities for empathy, such that the norm becomes emotionally charged and gains motivational efficacy. At the same time, the compassion is appropriately enlarged through getting the king to use his heart to reflect on what is right and appropriate for him to do as a king.

The anthropologist Naomi Quinn identifies one cross-cultural universal of child-rearing as the linking of moral lessons with emotional arousal, so as to make the lessons unmistakable, memorable, and motivating. In her discussion of Chinese child-rearing, for example, Quinn identifies the practice of shaming as an instrument for bringing home a moral lesson to a child while emotionally arousing him or her (Quinn 2005). There is even a hint of shaming when Mencius tells King Xuan in something of a scolding tone that for the king to say his kindness can reach the birds and beasts but that he cannot bring benefits to his people is like saying he is strong enough to lift 500 pounds, but not strong enough to lift a single feather.

What is missing from Mencius' attempted intervention with King Xuan, and perhaps a good part of the explanation why Mencius ultimately did not succeed in getting King Xuan to grow his sprouts, is the kind of constancy that Quinn describes as another universal feature of child rearing: moral lessons are a pervasive and consistent feature of social life for a child, often not explicitly stated, but communicated in a glance, a gesture, a posture, even in what is not said, that is observed in adults by children. Quinn even suggests some neurological correlates to the effects of these universal features. The regularity of lesson-giving strengthens certain synaptic connections in the brain; and drawing from Joseph LeDoux's seminal work (LeDoux 2002: 200–234), Quinn points out that hormones released during emotional arousal actually strengthen synaptic connections and organize and coordinate brain activity, crowding out all but the emotionally relevant experience out of consciousness. One might surmise that constancy of lesson-giving, woven into the fabric of everyday life, strengthens these synaptic connections even more. Going back to the *Analects*, what we see is in fact a community where such constancy and reinforcement are supplied under the leadership of Confucius. One can well imagine how the slightest look and posture of the body from Confucius could bring home a lesson to his students, much less to speak of the times when he erupts into frank and sometimes harsh and shaming criticism of his students' failings (e.g., the interactions with ZAI Wo in *Analects* 5.10 and 17.21).[12]

This brings us to an interesting feature of the *Analects* and the *Mengzi* that is not remarked upon as often as it should be. The greater focus in the Confucian texts, by far, is on the development of adults rather than of children. Even in their discussions of filial piety, Confucius and his students clearly focus on the duties of adult children toward their parents, not only to support them materially, but to do it with respect and with the proper countenance (*Analects* 2.7., 2.8). Mencius is engaged in the project of trying to persuade kings to cultivate themselves and to provide for their people the appropriate conditions for their cultivation. In *Mencius* 6A9, he remarks that the King of Qi's 齊 failure to be wise is no surprise since he has subjected his sprouts to one day of warmth and ten days of cold. The implication is not that the king was raised in inappropriate ways, but rather that he failed as an adult to nurture his sprouts.

[12] See Sarkissian 2010b for the very interesting connections between the Confucian emphasis on subtle details of personal style and the way an agent can influence others through such details.

This feature of the Confucian texts connects with a debate in contemporary personality theory as to whether personality is relatively fixed past a certain age. Under theories that personality traits arise from biological causes on something like Mencius' metaphor of water flowing downward, traits reach full maturity in early adulthood with little or no change afterward (McCrae and Costa 1996). Theories that emphasize development as arising from interaction between contextual factors and biology are more congenial to the idea of plasticity throughout the lifespan (Haan, Millsap, and Hartka 1986; Helson, Jones, and Kwan 2002). For example, the major life changes that occur in early and middle adulthood could constitute important contextual factors that play a role in personality change. Acquiring a job or a profession and taking on more responsibility significantly increase conscientiousness (one of the "big five" personality traits) well into middle adulthood. Marrying or partnering and having children are plausibly linked to increases in not only conscientiousness but also the trait of agreeableness (another of the big five). On some theories, people get better at regulating their own emotions as they get older and could decline in the levels of neuroticism (a third trait of the big five).

In one study with a large sample, adults between 21 and 60 showed an increase in conscientiousness and agreeableness throughout early and middle adulthood at varying rates; neuroticism declined among women but did not change among men. In general, mean levels of personality traits changed gradually but systematically throughout the lifespan, sometimes more after age 30 than before. Such results point to the role of contextual factors over the lifespan that interact with an individual's biology to produce change (Srivastava, John, Gosling, and Potter 2003). There could be several processes by which biology and contextual factors interact. Biological dispositions toward the development of conscientiousness could prompt people to seek out roles and relationships that require greater responsibility; but conversely, new responsibilities and relationship commitments may require people to become more responsible. Plausibly, both processes could take place in an interactive way: personality changes may lead people to select and shape environments that reinforce those changes (Caspi and Roberts 1999). Note that the effects of age and gender as revealed in studies were small to moderate, but that is to be expected given that they constitute a very small subset of the contextual factors that can potentially interact with biologically-based dispositions.

My point here is that early Confucian philosophy points precisely to the role of contextual factors, including ones that go well beyond age and gender and include factors that individuals deliberately put in place to foster moral development. The relational and holistic focus of Chinese thought weighs in favor of conducting more study of the possibilities that lie in moral-character change throughout a lifetime. This is especially helpful in the context of Western theories of moral development, which have primarily been based on the study of children and young adults.

To summarize, Mencius' sprout metaphor is appropriate in the sense that compassion may indeed have a biological basis and an adaptive function. It does correspond to a direction of growth, though the extent to which the direction is highly determinate and corresponds to specific ethical norms is very much open to debate. Moreover, the extent of growth over the course of an individual's life span may depend on highly contingent factors such as culturally-based learning that steers aroused emotion toward more of the objects it should be directed to, precisely in accordance with an ethical norm that is not necessarily embedded in human biology. In fact, we are led to expect such interaction between biologically-based desire and emotion on the one hand and culturally-based

learning if theorists such as Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson are right about the co-evolution of genes and culture (Boyd and Richerson 2005). The period of human biological evolution overlapped with the emergence of human culture, such that biology might have prepared us to regulate ourselves through culture because of its adaptive benefits. If human beings thrive through their cooperation with each other, we might expect certain biological traits that prepare us to be influenced by others and to imitate them. Such dispositions would prepare us to learn through culture complex ways of cooperating with each other, including moral norms that extend natural impulses of care toward family to others outside the family. In fact, I want to argue in the next section that if we pursue this line of inquiry—the interaction between culturally-based learning and biologically based dispositions, we will find an important place for the craft metaphor, not as a replacement for either the adornment or the sprout metaphor but alongside it. Besides adorning and growing our basic stuff to make moral excellence, we also craft it with the tools of culture. These processes can not only co-exist, I argue, but can interact and mutually support one another.

3 Adorning, Growing, and Crafting: Intertwined Processes in Moral Cultivation

Despite Xunzi's polemic against Mencius' supposedly confused conception of human nature, the way in which he develops the craft metaphor should lead us to see not only its compatibility with the adornment and sprout metaphors—once we allow that no single metaphor captures the complex process of moral cultivation—but also see with more specificity how the processes portrayed through these metaphors are connected and mutually dependent. I shall discuss how these processes might be illuminated by recent thinking about the nature of emotion and its relation to fast, unconscious, automatic processes on the one hand and on the other hand slow, deliberate, and conscious processes. Fast and slow processes are ultimately compatible. I discuss how a certain kind of meditation practice might fit in with a Confucian program for cultivating compassion. Finally, I end with a discussion of what the early Confucian metaphors do for us, and what they don't do.

3.1 Xunzi's Craft Metaphor

I have already noted in the first section that Xunzi does not recognize the conception of the inborn that underlies the more plausible sprout metaphor. But that is not the end of the difference between the two thinkers. In the "Xing E 性惡" ([Human] Nature is Bad) chapter, Xunzi asserts that far from being *shan* 善 (good), human nature is *e* 惡 because it contains a love of profit, envy, and hatred, and desires of the eyes and ears that lead to violence and anarchy (K 23.1a, [3] 151; Chinese text is consulted at http://ctext.org/xunzi). To avoid these consequences of indulging our spontaneous desires and impulses, it takes *wei* 偽 (conscious activity, deliberate effort), models and teaching, and guidance through observing ritual propriety and *yi* 義 (usually translated in the *Xunzi* as "standards of righteousness") (K 23.1b, [3] 151). Xunzi conceives one of the main functions of morality as the avoidance of harmful conflict over the resources to satisfy natural desire and the creation of harmonious cooperation to sustain and create

more such resources. This transformation of society requires a transformation of the human psyche. Natural emotions and desires must be transformed as a crooked piece of wood is steamed and then straightened upon a press frame, or as a straight piece of wood is curved with a press frame to make a wheel. Xunzi also uses the metaphor of a potter who molds a dish from clay to illustrate that human *xing* or nature does not contain the shape of the achieved result within it (K 23.4a, [3] 157). The craft metaphor of the *Analects*, along with its emphasis on the recalcitrant stuff in human beings that resists moral cultivation, comes back with a vengeance in the *Xunzi*.

At first glance, Xunzi's conception of moral cultivation could hardly be more different from Mencius'. This is especially true if one focuses on the "Human Nature is Bad" chapter, where Xunzi seems intent on emphasizing his disagreements with Mencius and where he mentions only love of profit and gain, envy and hatred as contained in human nature. Crucial to Xunzi's view of moral cultivation is the capability he does not subsume under human *xing*. This capability of the heart-mind is to approve or disapprove of the desires and emotions arising from *xing*. It makes possible the recognition that what is in our nature urgently needs transformation. As has been pointed out by a number of commentators, Xunzi seems quite well aware of the difficulties in creating enough trust so that people will feel confident enough to abide by the rules that sustain the social order (Goldin 1999; Van Norden 1992; Wong 2000). Even though they know that this social order will save everyone from the competition and conflict that results if everyone acts on unrestrained self-interest, they may always be tempted to "free ride" on other people's compliance to the rules and cheat when they can get away with it. Or they may have no initial thought of cheating, but are aware that others may, and will be tempted to strike first. Given that everyone can have such thoughts, the question of how to generate enough trust to promote widespread compliance with the rules becomes a compelling problem.

Xunzi's sophisticated solution is that there must be a psychological transformation that renders individuals trustworthy. He sometimes seems to suggest that the heart-mind's disapproval can simply arrest a tendency to act on these desires and emotions out of the recognition that to act on them would be to contribute to a situation of ceaseless conflict over the resources to satisfy them. Even if the heart-mind were to possess such a capability, however, that would not explain why Xunzi believes that human beings can develop a love of virtue (and at least in some individuals virtue itself) rather than simply regarding proper behavior as a necessary means to avoid the evil of conflict over resources (Wong 2000). What we encounter again is the paradox of virtue. To develop virtue it seems that we must already, in some sense, have it. In particular, we need the crucial motivation of wanting it.

In the first section, I discussed the solution to this paradox with reference to the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. One must recognize the complexity and diversity within human nature. We have motivations that both resist and depart from goodness and motivations that could be nurtured—not necessarily because they are already good, but because their direction of growth is congenial to and susceptible to being channeled and shaped toward goodness. That is the non-paradoxical sense in which we both need to develop virtue and already have it (that is, the right stuff that can be transformed into it). In terms of the metaphors of the *Analects*, we can both craft *and* adorn the self. Mengzi tends to highlight what we already have, but as I have argued, the sprout metaphor correctly draws attention to how much pro-active work there remains to be done with

what we already have. The water metaphor tends to obscure what remains to be done. Xunzi, perhaps partly in response to Mencius' emphasis on what we already have, especially when speaking in terms of the water metaphor, and perhaps partly from a far keener sense of how much in human nature resists moral cultivation, highlights what needs to be done. But I shall argue that in the *Xunzi* there are resources for addressing the paradox in roughly the way I have already outlined in the first section, and his solution can be put entirely in terms of the craft metaphor, clearly illustrating that there is only apparent paradox here.

At one point, Xunzi makes a very striking claim about the necessity for psychological transformation of one's deepest motivations:

> Who understands that risking death in carrying out a commission is how an officer cares for his life? Who understands that producing and supplying goods are how to nurture resources? Who knows that reverence and courtesy are how to nurture his security? Who knows that acting in accordance with ritual and moral principles and observing good form and reason are how to nurture his emotions?
>
> Accordingly, if one acts with only the preservation of his own life in view, death is inevitable. If one acts with only profit in mind, loss is certain. If one is indolent and timorous, thinking thereby he will be safe, danger is certain. If he seeks happiness through self-gratification, destruction is certain. (K 19.1d, [3] 56)

Xunzi is saying not only that *acting* in ways that apparently disregard one's own welfare is actually to promote one's welfare, but also that one must be *genuinely willing* to forgo advantage for oneself in order to be a trustworthy partner in cooperation and therefore in order to benefit from cooperation. What Xunzi suggests here is not far at all from being a solution to what the contemporary economist Robert Frank has called the problem of emotional commitment. Frank has noted that forms of mutually beneficial cooperation are hindered or made impossible by inability to trust one's potential partners. One needs assurance that others will not take advantage of one's cooperation and "bail out" of the agreement when it comes time for them to do their part. Frank proposes that evolution's answer to this fundamental problem for human cooperation is the capacity to make verifiable emotional commitments to others even if those commitments foreclose ways of acting that are beneficial for the self. In particular he thinks that an emotion of sympathy with others makes one more trustworthy to others because it provides them with a degree of assurance that one will live up to one's agreements even if one can gain an advantage by breaking them. Frank believes that there are mechanisms of natural selection that put in place the capacity for such adaptive emotions (Frank 2001).

Though Xunzi articulates no theory as to how such emotions got there, he clearly points to their existence when he is not trying to emphasize his differences with Mencius. In the chapter on ritual, for example, he asserts that all creatures of blood and *qi* 氣 love members of their own kind, and of these, human beings do so the most because they have awareness (K 19.9b, [3] 69). Such natural desires and feelings have the potential for supporting the kind of trust in others that is necessary for cooperation, and the problem posed by human nature is that they must contend with other natural desires and feelings, such as the desires for gain and sensual gratification, that easily

create unrestrained demand for the earth's resources and the resulting conflict. Xunzi explains music's importance to human beings by appeal to the necessity for expressing joy, whether it comes from the emotions of love or the thrill of combat and victory. Joy is an essential part of human nature that must be expressed, and therefore it is all important how it is expressed and toward which specific objects (K 20.1–3, [3] 80–84).

Antonio Cua has suggested that the tendency for the unordered mix of natural human desires and feelings to lead to competition and conflict is in fact what Xunzi meant by declaring that human nature is bad (Cua 2005). To counter this tendency, it is necessary to reshape the raw material of natural desires and feelings. While a view toward one's long-term self-interest will draw one's attention to this necessity, it does not point to the path by which self-interest in any form can give way to doing what is right even if it costs one's life. The most promising ideas in the *Xunzi* for how to get this motivational reshaping started take advantage of the other-regarding emotions that are congenial to shaping by ritual propriety and standards of rightness.

These emotions need to be strengthened in relation to the desires for gain and profit and related emotions such as envy. In this respect, Xunzi's understanding of how the emotional commitment problem is to be solved is *superior* to Frank's. The latter sometimes writes as if the biologically given capacities were all that are needed, revealing excessive confidence that biological evolution provides all. What Xunzi understood is that however these emotional *capacities* got there, they need to be cultivated and refined through culture to do the sort of job Frank thinks they do. Xunzi says, "Those who live in Chu [楚] have the characteristics of Chu; those who live in Yue [越] have the characteristics of Yue; and those who live in Xia [夏] have the characteristics of Xia. This is not due to the qualities endowed by their inborn nature from *Tian*, but is the result of accumulated 'polishing'" (K 8.11, [2] 82). At the end of his chapter on the badness of *xing*, Xunzi says, "If you do not know your son, look at his friends; if you do not know your lord look to his attendants. It is the environment that is critical! It is the environment that is critical!" (K 23.8, [3] 162)

3.2 Making the Right Tools for the Job and Respecting the Structure of Your Material

The tools for reshaping emotion must be of the right sort in order to do the job. Consider Xunzi's argument that the mourning period for parents must extend into the third year because the natural emotions involved, perhaps in combination with the practical requirements of providing for the living, do not permit of shorter or longer periods (K 19.9c, [3] 70). Xunzi is bluntly assertive about why mourning for parents must extend into the third year. The length was established to be equal to the emotions involved and hence do not admit of either diminution or addition: "The greater the wound, the longer it remains; the more pain it gives, the more slowly it heals" (K 19.9a, [3] 69). Though Xunzi's argument is implausible for its insistence that natural emotion dictates a precise mourning period for parents, the underlying idea is not at all implausible. Emotions and desires cannot simply be repressed or their expression in action simply held in check by the heart-mind's capacity for approval and disapproval. Rather, they must be given, under the direction of the heart-mind, an appropriate measure of satisfaction and expression in socially beneficial ways. This idea is applied to natural feelings that are generally congenial to morality such as the love for parents

that turns into grief and mourning upon their deaths. Rituals that "fit" the intensity and duration of such emotions not only properly "adorn" them but also strengthen and therefore craft the corresponding emotional dispositions, that is, to have them more consistently on the appropriate occasions. That is why rituals have to take a certain form to do the job they were intended to do. That is why music must be of the right sort, because not only does it have the power to arouse and intensify emotion, but different kinds can be selected to arouse different emotions and to arouse them toward different objects. In short, the tools of the craftsman must themselves be shaped and selected to fit the material they are used to shape.

Consider now that some, though not all of the crafting that must be done consists in strengthening what is already there, such as love and joy, and that has a natural direction of growth that is at least roughly congenial to morality. This kind of crafting is like the growing process in Mencius' sprout metaphor. What Xunzi adds by viewing the process through the lens of the craft metaphor, however, is the idea that a considerable element of design goes into moral transformation even when one is encouraging the growth of something already there.

Raw material has a structure that must be respected by the craftsman and that constrains the nature and shape of the final product. A wheelwright, in seeking to make straight pieces of wood into a wheel, will need to take into account the internal structure of the wood and the function that a wheel is meant to serve. That will mean choosing wood that is strong enough to carry weight but also has fibers that can be steamed and reshaped on a press frame. A potter is constrained in the kind of vessel she ultimately produces by the nature of the clay available to her and by the function the artifact is to fulfill. Analogously, to produce beings capable of sustained self-restraint with respect to desires for material goods and sensual gratification, the artisan heart-mind needs to find structural properties of the human psychic economy that make self-restraint not only bearable but necessary for a far greater and more deeply satisfying good.

In some of its most interesting and plausible passages, the *Xunzi* acknowledges that the craftsman of the mind cannot merely strive to eliminate or repress trouble-making desires such as those for material goods and sensual satisfaction. In seeking to remove the causes of conflict between people, it must assure their material desires some measure of satisfaction:

> How did ritual principles arise? I say that men are born with desires which, if not satisfied, cannot but lead men to seek to satisfy them. If in seeking to satisfy their desires men observe no measure and apportion things without limits, then it would be impossible for them not to contend over the means to satisfy their desires. Such contention leads to disorder. Disorder leads to poverty. The Ancient Kings abhorred such disorder so they established the regulations contained with ritual and moral principles in order to apportion things, to nurture the desires of men, and to supply the means for their satisfaction. They so fashioned their regulations that desires should not want for the things which satisfy them and goods would not be exhausted by the desires. In this way the two of them, desires and goods, sustained each other over the course of time. This is the origin of ritual principles.
>
> Thus, the meaning of ritual is to nurture. (K 19.1a–b, [3] 55)

Xunzi's use of "nurture" (*yang* 養) to describe the action of ritual upon desire suggests that the craft metaphor need not be regarded as incompatible with the sprout metaphor. Not only is it the case that they can be used to understand different parts of the cultivation process, but crafting itself can involve working *with* the character of the raw stuff one begins with in such a way that the crafting can also nurture and sustain some aspects of its given character.

Moreover, Xunzi addresses the question of how much material gain and sensual satisfaction is enough so as to satisfy the desires for them. There is no absolute amount that is constituted "enough." Rather, what constitutes enough depends on the person's psychic economy as a whole. The intensity of desires interacts with other desires within a person's psychic economy. The *Xunzi* says that a serene and happy heart-mind will be satisfied with colors less than ordinary, with sounds less than average, and a diet of vegetables and a broth of greens that nurture the mouth (K 22.6e, [3] 13). On the other hand, if that security and peace is missing, no amount of material goods will be experienced as enough (K 22.6d, [3] 137–138).

In what is that serenity and happiness based, and how is that happiness compatible with the self-discipline morality requires? I suggest that it is based in natural emotions and desires that could be deeply satisfying and sustaining of social cooperation when channeled in the right directions. They are precisely those emotions and desires, such as love of one's own kind and gratitude to them for one's own nurturance, that must be fostered and strengthened through ritual activity and music along some of their pre-existing directions. These motivational elements provide a context within which the burden of self-restraint eventually is no longer felt as constraint, but rather enabling of a greater contentment than could ever have been made possible by the unrestrained pursuit of material satisfaction and its related emotions. Notice that these motivational elements are such that they carry a person's interest and concern beyond his or her own individual survival. They are a crucial element of the most plausible story along Xunzian lines of how the problem of emotional commitment can be solved.

Recall that I said one must be willing to forgo advantage for oneself to be a trustworthy partner in cooperation. What Xunzi's story of cultivation reveals is that one learns the advantage one must be willing to forgo is a small thing in relation to a good that one has cultivated oneself to experience and appreciate. Notice, moreover, how the processes of working *with* our natures, cultivating and encouraging and channeling love and joy, for example, is a crucial component of the process of reshaping other elements of our nature—moderating the desires and emotions that carry us into the most severe and persistent conflicts with each other. The happiness we achieve through the cultivation of love and joy by the right forms of ritual and music places the satisfaction of desires for material gain and sensual satisfaction in a new psychic context, where they become much less urgent and less demanding of our attention and personal resources. What we get is a keener sense of when enough is enough. Going in the other direction, we can see how moderating the desires for material gain and sensual gratification might make it possible for us to dedicate more of our attention and personal resources to the cultivation of love and taking joy in the right things. Within the single metaphor crafting, then, it is possible to see not only how the apparent paradox of virtue is resolved, but also how the two sides of that paradox actually require one another.

Thus the *Xunzi*'s narrative of the origin of morality suggests, quite correctly in my view, that culture and human nature can interact so as to alter each other's shape.[13] It would be surprising if the details of the narrative we can tell now, based on what some of our best theory and evidence provides, weren't different even if the basic idea were the same as the *Xunzi*'s. Kline, developing a suggestion from David Nivison (Nivison 1996b), has suggested that a plausible emendation of Xunzi's narrative is that morality emerged over the course of many generations rather than being invented by brilliant and wise sage kings. All that is needed are wise people who have a better than average understanding of human beings and their environment, with perhaps a better than average awareness of and ability to regulate their own natural desires and emotions. Through careful observation and gradual experiment, suggests Kline, the sages created and shaped ritual until it reached (on the *Xunzi*'s view), the "perfect" ritual order of the early Zhou 周 kings (Kline 2000: 164–165). Besides demurring from the idea that a perfect order was found in the past, and in the same spirit as Kline's, I suggest an emendation that departs some more from the *Xunzi*'s narrative. Though there might be moments and stages in the emergence and evolution of moralities during which wise or at least wiser than average people deliberately designed and tinkered with rituals and standards of rightness, it is far more plausible to think that the process also involved, apart from conscious design and tinkering, selection pressures operating on those rituals and standards with some degree of acceptance in a given society, pressures that were analogous to those operating in biological evolution. Though such selection pressures cannot be counted upon to produce moral progress, they do produce moral change, and sometimes progress, and sometimes human beings can become aware of the need for change and contribute to moral progress through deliberate redesign of their moralities and institutions and practices (and sometimes, they make things worse).

In the previous section I mentioned Richerson and Boyd's theory about the co-evolution of genes and culture and connected it to Mencius' sprout conception of moral

[13] There is detailed and illuminating scholarship on the question of how, in the *Xunzi*, deliberate effort, learning, and culture interact with human *xing*. T. C. Kline argues that as Xunzi used the word *yu* 欲 (that is usually and here translated as "desire"), it means a response to an "innate emotional state" (Kline 2000: 161). While agreeing in large part with my interpretation of Xunzi (Wong 2000), Kline points out that it is misleading to write as I did that moral transformation is motivated by the total set of the agent's desires when some of these are conceived as motivations derived from the agent's reflections. He is right in speculating that I was using an ordinary, broader sense of "desire" in setting forth my interpretive proposal, one that includes motivations with cognitive components that were not in the original desires of *xing*. Kline writes about these more complex forms of motivation as "new forms of desire": whereas we originally had the desire to find anything to satisfy our thirst, we develop desires to drink in the ritually prescribed manner (as in the village drinking ceremony, where elders drink from the communal cup first) (Kline 2006: 242).

Another related issue regarding the status of *xing* in cultivation is whether it is literally transformed. On the one hand, there are passages indicating that the *xing* of the virtuous person is the same as the *xing* of small men (e.g., K 3.2, 3.14, 23.4a; [1] 174, [1] 180, [3] 157). On the other hand, Xunzi also uses the phrase *huaxing* 化性 (pretty naturally translatable as "transform *xing*") when characterizing what the sages do with their *xing* (K 23.2a, 23.4a; [3] 154[3] 157). Kurtis Hagen's approach is to argue that there is no literal transformation of *xing* because its desires are "basic desires" that are relatively nonspecific (Hagen 2011: 62). What in fact may change are the specific objects of desire. The previous example would also serve to illustrate the difference: a basic desire to drink out of thirst could take any number of specific objects, including ethically impermissible ones; the virtuous person only desires specific objects that are ethically permissible. I find this solution plausible, and it has the merit of being quite plausible in its own right as a view about human psychology. If we have unlearned desires, it is quite plausible that their objects are importantly indeterminate; it may be part of our makeup as creatures adapted to use culture that we are not hardwired to go after many specific objects.

cultivation. It is even more appropriate to connect Xunzi to Richerson and Boyd and to their further characterization, authored with Henrich, of the possible process of evolution by which human beings could have developed their present impressive capacity to cooperate on a large scale. Human beings might have started out with a biological inheritance that could have sustained cooperation in small groups, but their capacity to regulate themselves through cultural norms could have made that initial cooperation more extensive and complex. The new forms of cultural cooperation form a new ecological niche in which beings with greater cooperative tendencies would have been favored. The result is a kind of "ratcheting" process that intertwines both biological and cultural evolution (Richerson, Boyd, and Henrich 2003: 387). Again, we cannot attribute to Xunzi, any more than we could to Mencius, an awareness of natural selection. But Boyd, Richerson, and Henrich may have described the process by which human beings eventually acquired the motivations that Xunzi relied upon in describing how moral excellence is achieved. That is, their "ratcheting" process involves the mutual adjustment over generations of the cultural tools of ritual and standards of righteousness on the one hand and human psychology on the other. As they change, one changes to fit the other. Certainly, the idea that human psychology and culture can interact in such a way as to mutually shape one another is there in the *Xunzi*. Here again, we encounter the relational and holistic approach that we found in Mencius and that resonates with some of the most interesting contemporary scientific theory. I next discuss how early Confucian philosophy relates to one of the most pressing issues in contemporary moral psychology.

3.3 Deliberate Effort and the Spontaneous in Cultivation

To what extent can human beings, in striving to become better people, control and/or change their most powerful desires and emotions? Much recent empirical and theoretical work in psychology emphasizes the formidable obstacles that stand in the way of the conscious, deliberate effort to change the self's most powerful motivations. This is because we are typically unaware of these motivations and their effect on our attitudes, judgment, and behavior. In one of Paul Rozin's classic experiments, subjects were reluctant to drink a sugary liquid they knew perfectly well to be harmless, apparently deterred by a "poison" image on the label, even though the image was preceded by a "not" in front of it (Rozin, Millman, and Nemeroff 1986). In this case, the power of unconscious emotion triggered by an affectively charged image is linked to the phenomenon of "automaticity": that human beings process much information from the world very quickly and beneath the level of consciousness (Bargh and Chartrand 1999).

Emotions very often involve this fast processing, which takes the form of a unconscious assessment or appraisal of something or someone in terms of what matters to the agent (e.g., fear of something as posing danger), along with changes in physiological state (e.g., facial expression, quickening of pulse) that serve as signals to others and/or as preparation for appropriate action (e.g., flight or fight). In his pioneering studies of brain lesions, Joseph LeDoux has demonstrated that fear can be elicited in reflex-like fashion through a "low road" in the oldest (in terms of evolution) parts of the brain (a subcortical pathway directly to the amygdala) and bypassing the neo-cortex, the part of the brain associated with higher-level cognitive functions (LeDoux 1993). One plausible construal of the nature of these fast, automatic, and unconscious

appraisals is that they are "seeing" things "as" this or that or "under the aspect of" this or that. One perceives features of things as salient and under some category that expresses evaluation in terms of what matters to the agent. Such perception is not the product of judgment formed through activity of the neo-cortex, which explains why it influences behavior independently of conscious belief and reasoning. Furthermore, contemporary moral psychology has come to an increasing recognition of the power of unconscious emotions over moral belief. Disgust over the thought of incest in a specific case can motivate the judgment that it is immoral even when the harms usually cited as the basis for condemning it (e.g., genetic defects, emotional damage, social disapproval) are explicitly removed by the description of the case (Haidt 2001).

A slower, deliberate, and conscious mode of processing can also occur in the process of having an emotion. It can co-occur with the initial fast response to something or someone, and can result in a reappraisal of the object of emotion, in the form of specific discriminations of the way or the degree to which the object is something to be feared, for example. It may involve complex forms of reflection about the self ("Why am I feeling this way?" or "What's out there that's causing me to react like this?" "Is it reasonable for me to feel this way?"). This slower track can result in conscious choice of an action or a modification of an action that is tightly connected to the fast response (e.g., an involuntary startle response to a loud bang may lead to scanning of the environment for possible sources of threat and to a decision to take cover).

A related difficulty for the deliberate effort to change one's motivations is the much discussed influence of situations over attitude and behavior. Since at least the 1970s social psychologists have revealed through their experiments such substantial influence of situational factors that the question has been raised as to whether there really are character traits as conceived under a commonsense perspective. Can dispositions to perceive, feel, and act in certain relatively consistent ways manifest themselves over a wide range of different kinds of situations, or do even seemingly minor situational factors prompt perceptions, feelings, and actions that depart from how we might characterize a person's traits? The classic psychological studies in this vein seem to show, to present a couple of examples, that ordinary respectable American citizens will administer dangerous electrical shocks to an innocent person when urged to do so by an experimenter in a lab coat (Milgram 1974), and that being late for an appointment is the most influential factor in whether a seminary student will stop and help someone who seems to be falling ill, even if the appointment is to attend a lecture on the Good Samaritan (Darley and Batson 1973).

Other potential barriers to deliberately changing one's motivations are longer-standing environmental factors that influence unconscious and automatic processes as well as preventing one from perceiving, feeling, or doing what is right or appropriate. Whether conscious or not, some emotional appraisals of objects and events might be hard-wired. Human beings might be hard-wired to readily detect in the perceptual field a snake-shaped object making sudden movements, and they might be more easily predisposed to learn to fear it.[14] Other appraisals obviously involve substantial learning that presupposes immersion in cultural norms and practices, for example, being afraid

[14] In other words, fear of snakes may not be wholly hard-wired, but our ready perception of live snakes may be close to being so. My thanks to Neil Levy for alerting me to this issue. See Mineka, Davidson, Cook, and Keir 1984; LoBue and DeLoache 2008.

of a stock market crash. Emotions thus can be more or less hard-wired with respect to the sort of appraisals they involve. This is also true of the motivational directions emotions involve. "Motivational direction" refers to action tendencies associated with an emotion. Emotional appraisals are not just evaluations of things, events, and persons in the world, but often prepare us to act in response to those evaluations. For example, appraising something as dangerous can involve physiological changes preparing a person to flee or fight in response. Some of these changes might be hard-wired or pretty close to it, such as quickening of the heart-rate and tensing of muscles. Some motivational directions obviously involve considerable learning, such as the tendency to move one's savings into gold.

One's perception of what is dangerous, whether hard-wired or learned, might become more discerning through learning, for example, learning which snakes are harmless to humans and which ones are poisonous. Motivational directions can be changed through learning. One might be taught not to try to kill a venomous snake since a snake is most likely to bite a human when attacked, or that moving one's savings into gold is not ultimately prudent. The learning of cultural norms can have similar effects. Mauss and her colleagues illustrate the effect of culture through the story of a woman from Hawai'i driving in southern California, who was cut off by another driver who then suddenly slowed down in front of her. Instead of becoming enraged, she remained quite calm and did not even have to exercise conscious restraint. Anger never crossed her mind, because in Hawai'i people simply do not display anger with other drivers. After spending more time in southern California, however, she began responding with intense rage at similar incidents (Mauss, Bunge, and Gross 2008: 39). Cultural norms can influence the way people experience and express emotions even without their consciously making efforts at self-control in accordance with these norms.

In one experiment Mauss and her colleagues "primed" their subjects to control their emotions or to express them by having them perform sentence unscrambling tasks (taking word jumbles and making sentences out of them). For one group, embedded in the jumbles were emotion-control words such as "restrains" and "cool." For the other group, embedded in the jumbles were words like "volatile" and "hot." Then subjects in both groups participated in an event designed to provoke their anger. Participants primed with emotion-control words reported less anger experience after provocation than those primed with emotion-expression words. Mauss and her colleagues interpreted the results to indicate that people have goals and cultural norms requiring emotional restraint and control that can be activated and then begin operation when the relevant situation comes along (Mauss, Cook, and Gross 2007).

How might Confucian cultivation pertain to the influence of unconscious and automatic mental/physical processes, and to situational factors both episodic and long-standing? Part of the program of Confucian self-cultivation involves study of the classics, memorized and rehearsed until they become fully internalized and unconscious patterns of thought (Slingerland 2009). This is one characteristic pattern of Confucian self-transformation: one consciously, deliberately, and assiduously undertakes a program that inculcates dispositions to have ethically appropriate emotional responses and patterns of conduct. The intent is to make the dispositions for these responses reliable and resistant to undue situational influence. The dispositions inculcated may even be dispositions to have certain unconscious and automatic emotional responses and patterns of conduct. Confucian study of the classics, in Mauss et al.'s

terms, might involve the inculcation and priming reinforcement of goals and norms having to do with the "self-discipline" mentioned in *Analects* 12.1 (Mauss et al. 2008). We might indeed talk of a group "culture" formed by Confucius and his students, wherein they reinforce in each other such goals and norms, or a group culture that sustains relationships such as that between Confucius and YAN Hui 顏回.[15]

Observance of ritual propriety constitutes an enactment of ethically required attitudes such as respect and concern, an "exercising" of emotional dispositions that strengthens them. This exercising cannot be done mindlessly. As I indicated in the first section, it involves the effort to achieve a right fit between the form and substance of ritual, where the form is the physical gesture, bodily posture or pattern of conduct and the substance is the affective attitude. The form is deprived of its expressive meaning when the affective attitude it was meant to express is absent. The ritual form can be suited to the attitude or can be misaligned with it in varying degrees. As noted in the first section, the implication of *Analects* 9.3 is that the ill-fit (bowing after ascending the hall) can subvert the desired attitude (deference to a superior). Thus in some cases, choosing the right form for the intended attitude involves both a reflective awareness of what the intended attitude is supposed to be in the given ritual and a sense of which of the possible and available forms is most suitable for expressing the intended attitude. This includes not only the question of when and where to bow in relation to the recipient, but whether. Bowing is appropriate toward a superior, but Confucius would not bow on receiving gifts from friends, even those as lavish as a horse and carriage; the only exception was for a sacrificial gift (*Analects* 10.23). To make such judgments about ritual, one must learn their point or purpose. When Confucius entered the Grand Ancestral Hall, he asked questions about everything (*Analects* 10.21). When someone queried why a man supposed to know about observing ritual propriety asked so many questions, Confucius responded that doing so observes ritual propriety (*Analects* 3.15).

Slingerland observes that Confucians have two ways of addressing the "high bar" challenge of overcoming the undesirable influence of situations. The first is to train long and hard to jump higher, for example, the forms of emotional training discussed earlier. Training oneself in ritual both strengthens desired emotional dispositions and in contemporary psychological terminology "primes" unconscious and automatic activation of one's goals for emotional self-regulation. This "priming" effect of ritual also

[15] Though it is often convenient to talk about cultural norms and values in a very general way, I want to explicitly disassociate myself from a common reification of culture as an abstract entity that exists apart from the activities of individuals in relationship. Culture is embodied in and sustained by these activities. The role it plays in moral transformation very much depends on the identities of the agents and the way they interact. Vogeley and Roepstorff put this point well: "Culture is not a well-defined rigid body of rules that shapes each and every individual of a given culture in a similar, uniform way; instead, it dynamically and continuously interacts with its constituting individuals" (Vogeley and Roepstorff 2009: 512). We can talk of love of learning as a Confucian cultural value. However, to see what such a love amounts to as a value, we must look at particular ways that value was realized and constituted. The *Analects* provide an *exemplar* of the process of moral cultivation and of the way it is conducted in relationship with others—an exemplar of moral character emerging from interaction with others (see Tan 2005 and Olberding 2008). They embody a particular way in which learning and culture contribute to moral transformation. Confucius and YAN Hui's shared love of learning is a particular exemplification of a cultural value that was transmitted over generations, but in those later generations, love of learning inevitably takes different particular forms that involve different individuals and courses of relationship. The particular teacher-student and friendship relationship was very much a matter of how Confucius and YAN Hui were, but again served as an exemplar for later generations that also inevitably took on different particular forms.

illustrates Slingerland's second way of addressing the high bar challenge, which is to "lower the bar" by manipulating features of the situation so as to make it easier for the agent to feel and do the right things. Through rituals, one embeds in one's life reminders and re-enforcers of one's goals for self-transformation (Slingerland 2011).

However, one should not neglect the possible effectiveness of conscious and more direct control of emotions. The Confucians believed in the power of the heart-mind to reflect on its own most minute workings and through awareness of these workings to redirect its own activities so as to orient them in an ethical direction (Shun 2004: 188). There is intriguing evidence in recent psychological studies pointing toward such a possibility. In his classic study of what made the difference between children who could control their own impulses and delay gratification for the sake of greater future reward (not immediately eating one marshmallow sitting in front of one in order to get two in fifteen minutes), Mischel and his colleagues found that the children with more self-control employed various mental strategies such as not looking at the marshmallow or singing to themselves. By changing the focus of their thoughts, they could delay gratification longer than children who let their eyes and thoughts linger on the immediate reward. Moreover, children who displayed greater self-control on the marshmallow test later showed more social and cognitive competence and were more successful in school (Mischel, Shoda, and Rodriguez 1989; see Levy 2007 for a discussion of Mischel et al.). From a theoretical point of view, we might expect such a result if in fact there are two tracks in emotional processes: not only a fast, automatic, and unconscious track by which we assess and react to features in the world, but also a slow and reflective track by which we become aware of our immediate impulses, reflect on them, and possibly inhibit or change motivational directions by changing how we think of the objects we have appraised in our emotions. Confucianism might indeed have been an ancient program for enhancing the power of the more reflective track.

There is a limit on how much human beings can regulate their own emotional lives because the exercise of willpower drains a limited supply of mental and physical energy (see Slingerland 2009, citing Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, and Tice 1998). There is some recent evidence that we might be able to push back those limits to some extent. For example, one study reveals that affirming a value bearing importance to the self can help to counteract the depleting effects of activities that require self-control, perhaps in the service of that value (Schmeichel and Vohs 2009). Another study claims that only people who *believed* that self-control drew from a limited resource displayed the effect of depletion after engaging in self-control (Jobs, Dweck, and Walton 2010). Those who believed that self-control did *not* draw from a limited resource supposedly did not show depleting effects. However, a subsequent study has shown that the belief factor operates only in cases where moderate depletion was in the offing (Vohs, Baumeister, and Schmeichel 2012).[16] The ultimate point to carry forward, however, is that the Confucians point us toward the real possibility of increasing our resources for the cognitive control of emotions while at the same time lessening the power of those psychological forces that need to be controlled in the first place.[17]

[16] My thanks go to Neil Levy for pointing out this later study, which helped me to correct my initial overenthusiasm for the idea that believing makes it so. In personal correspondence, he indicates that some of his own study on this issue points to the reality of the depletion effect while also indicating that it might be of shorter duration than the Baumeister studies indicate.

[17] My thanks again to Levy for clarifying what should be my main point in this context.

Furthermore, in considering how to increase our ability to cultivate durable and consistent dispositions that comprise the ethical virtues, we should consider the perspective that informs the self-cultivation projects of Confucius and his students. They were very much aware of the lack of virtue as a social and political condition and not merely as an individual condition that just happened to be widespread (Hutton 2006 makes this point). There is a reason why Confucius and Mencius after him sought to have kings adopt their teachings. If in fact the achievement of robust virtues requires long and hard training, supported and guided by others who have taken similar paths before, and if as *Mencius* 1A7 holds, people cannot engage in such training until they have the material security that enables them to take their minds off the sheer task of survival, then it is no mystery at all why there are no such traits in societies structured to achieve very different goals. Similarly, it would be no mystery in societies where survival is not an issue but where people's desires for material gain and sensuous satisfaction are nurtured for the sake of fueling an economic engine that needs to keep producing and selling goods. Ironically, the situationist psychological experiments do not take into account this underlying relational factor that might deeply influence the ability of people to form robust virtues, and neither do the philosophical critics of virtue ethics who rely on the situationist experimental evidence.

3.4 How Reflection and Automaticity Might Co-exist in Effortful Effortlessness

It might be thought that the idea of conscious control of emotions runs into difficulty within the framework of Confucian self-cultivation because the Confucian ideal includes not just the self-watchfulness that is required for cognitive control but also the ability to freely and spontaneously act from the correct emotions. Is it really possible to attain an ideal that requires constant watchfulness over one's faults and being full of questions when at the Ancestral Hall (*Analects* 10.21, 3.15), and at the same time the ease and naturalness of being able to act freely from one's heart's desires and not overstepping the bounds (*Analects* 2.4)? This question also pertains with special cogency to Xunzi, since he places so much importance on the heart-mind's capacity for approval and disapproval and its role in reshaping one's psychic economy of desire and emotion, and also on the necessity for deeply understanding the essence of the myriad things and the warp and woof of Heaven and earth (K 21.5e, [3] 105). A the same time he upholds an ideal in which the sage is able to make discriminations that are appropriate to each situation as it comes with no prior consideration or planning beforehand (K 5.10, [1] 210). Slingerland (2003) considers the latter part of the ideal that of *wuwei* 無為 or effortless action. The question is how, then, we effortfully become effortless.

Some help is available if we take the diachronic, as opposed to synchronic, perspective (Fraser 2007). From a diachronic perspective, the *process* might involve self-conscious monitoring and restraining refractory desires, but the *later result* is, say, the transformation of once-refractory desires and the mastery of the details of ritual action such that one need no longer pay conscious attention to that aspect of what one is doing and one is able to focus fully on the feeling toward and with others that is being expressed in ritual action. The *Xunzi* in effect takes this diachronic perspective when it distinguishes between the effortless discrimination-making of the sage and the somewhat more effortful discrimination of the scholar and gentleman who considers problems in advance and plans for them early (K 5.10, [1] 210–211). This suggests that the

ideal of the sage lies at the very upper limit of remaining human, and the problem loses much of its paradoxical air from that perspective.

I want to add another perspective that acknowledges the complexity of the heart-mind and the processes by which it conducts its most impressive activities. To introduce that perspective, I turn to the Cook Ding 丁 story in the third chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, often taken as an example of the way in which supremely skillful activity does not involve thought about what one is doing but instead an intuitive and immediate responsiveness to the material and to the situation. Cook Ding has reached a level of skill in cutting up oxen that he is able to glide his knife through the spaces and joints without encountering resistance. What is often neglected in the story, however, is the Cook's description of what he does when he comes to a difficult place in the ox: "I see where it will be hard to handle and cautiously prepare myself, my gaze settles on it, action slows down for it, you scarcely see the flick of the chopper—and at one stroke the tangle has been unraveled, as a clod crumbles to the ground" (*Zhuangzi*, chapter 3; Graham 2001: 64). This moment in the Cook's story indicates not just that the flow of un–self-conscious activity can be interrupted when the agent gets to a part of the activity that requires self-monitoring, but also that a continuous self-monitoring is operating at another level, perhaps pushed into the background of the subconscious or conscious when things are going smoothly, but present nevertheless in case self-conscious direction is needed in the foreground of consciousness.

Such complex layering is made possible by parallel processing involving different areas and circuits of the brain, with feedback mechanisms to enable coordination between the two levels of intuitive and self-monitoring processing. To use another analogy, the master musician may achieve such a level of mastery over her instrument that she does not need to concentrate on what she is doing with her fingers, but on one level of consciousness she is monitoring how the performance is going, and ready to activate self-monitored action when the going gets tough.[18] If she is playing with others, for example, she will need to adjust her playing to what she is hearing from others. Where interaction with other human beings is involved in complex sociopolitical contexts, it is even more plausible that both intuitive and self-monitoring processing should operate in skillful activity. Dealing with a difficult place in a dead ox is a far simpler task than reading how another person is reacting to one's words and actions and making adjustments in the course of a conversation in order to achieve one's goal. That in turn is a simpler task when one is in the course of that conversation not trying to accomplish some predetermined goal of one's own but is striving "on the fly" to reconcile one's interests with the other person's interests.

This is not to deny that automatic, nonconscious processes can play an important role in the Confucian ideal. Sarkissian (2010a) has usefully related Antonio Damasio's somatic marker theory to the Confucian ideal of *wuwei*: emotional responses, whether of positive or negative salience, are associated with certain situational features through biological hard-wiring or through personal or cultural learning; these responses are bodily physiological changes that somatically "mark" these situational features and highlight them as highly relevant for choice-making. The process is typically automatic and unconscious. Damasio holds that such markers are necessary for helping human beings manage what would otherwise be an unmanageable array of choices (Damasio 1994). Positively marked

[18] I thank Michael Krausz, a philosopher, painter, and conductor, for this insight expressed in conversation.

options are saliently choice-worthy; negatively marked options need no further consideration. On Sarkissian's view, Confucius' program of self-cultivation produces, in effect, countless somatic markers, facilitating a fast response to an increasingly wide range of life situations. But however thoroughly people go through a program of self-cultivation, it seems implausible that they will have "somatically marked" all the situational features they will have to deal with in the future. It is implausible, in other words, that they will never encounter situations novel enough to require some deliberation or reflection. The very fact that *yi* or rightness is rightness in a particular context and can never be fully captured by a general rule (*Analects* 4.10) guarantees significant novelty. That is why a two-level theory involving both an automatic and unconscious level and a conscious, reflective level seems the most consistent with the total configuration of features of Confucian ethics (see Tiwald 2010 for a discussion of Dai Zhen's 戴震 defense of the role of reflection in the Confucian ideal against neo-Confucians such as Zhu Xi 朱熹, who emphasized the spontaneous).

In effect, then, I am suggesting there is a much more interesting underlying complexity to the apparent simplicity of the *wuwei* ideal. It is not just that reflection and deliberation are needed to get to that ideal state, but that the ideal state needs to be understood as manifesting various levels of activity, some of which still involve thoughtfulness and deliberation. If this suggestion works, the sage draws a bit closer to us ordinary human beings.

3.5 The Sprout and Craft Processes as Interacting and Mutually Supportive in Compassion Meditation

I would like to discuss another way in which adorning, growing, and crafting interweave and mutually support one another, this time focusing on the issue of whether efforts to deliberately and directly cultivate certain emotions can be effective. For my illustrative case I turn to another tradition of self-cultivation that involves, as in the Mencian case, a shift in mental focus. In Buddhist compassion meditation, the idea is to expand the scope of one's compassion through focusing, typically in the beginning, on wishing for the wellbeing or freedom from suffering of a loved one and then later in training trying to generate a similar state of mind toward everyone in general and no one in particular. Lutz and his colleagues conducted a brain imaging study of master meditators (those who have practiced meditation for at least 10,000 hours) as they engaged in compassion meditation and found that in comparison with novice meditators performing the same meditation, they showed marked response to emotional vocalizations of distress in the insula region of the brain, important for detecting emotion in others and specifically in mapping bodily responses to emotion such as heart rate and blood pressure and making that information available to other parts of the brain. Activity also increased in the temporal parietal juncture, particularly in the right hemisphere, which has been implicated in processing empathy, especially in perceiving the mental and emotional state of others. Lutz and his colleagues think that this study suggests the possibility of cultivating compassion through meditation (Lutz, Brefcynski-Lewis, Johnstone, and Davidson 2008). If so, meditation is a kind of growing of the sprout of compassion, and may be likened to Mencian reflection, *si* 思, that contributes to such growth.

Furthermore, it is said that compassion involves the ability to regulate one's thoughts and emotions. One way in which self-regulation might be relevant to nurturing

compassion is through the fact that unmodulated distress and anger can feed a self-preoccupation and defensiveness that obstructs openness to others. This lack of modulation is reflected in activation of the amygdala, which initiates a cascade of bodily changes in preparation for self-defense or attack. In a brain imaging study in which people were shown photographs of angry or fearful faces, Lieberman and his colleagues found that the amygdala was less active when subjects named their feelings, calling them "anger" or "sadness," for instance. That labeling corresponded to greater activity in the right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex, which is associated with thinking in words about emotional experience and also with inhibiting behavior and processing emotions (Lieberman, Inagaki, Tabibnia, and Crockett 2011).

Creswell and his colleagues conducted a survey of participants in Lieberman's brain imaging study and rated them on their disposition to Buddhist mindfulness: paying attention to one's present feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations without passing judgment or reacting. As the mindful meditator is typically instructed, one takes note of these internal events and "lets them go." Creswell and his colleagues found that subjects in Lieberman's study who were more mindful in disposition had more activation in the right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex and less activation in the amygdala, suggesting that the more mindful bring more prefrontal resources to turn down the amygdala. In other words, the effect of mindfulness may be similar to the effect of "naming" emotions—distancing the self from them and dampening their effects (Creswell, Way, Eisenberger, and Lieberman 2007). What we have here is akin to Xunzi's crafting processes in which immoderate and agitating desires that stand in the way of ethical cultivation are moderated and set into a kind of right balance with a psychic economy in which "love of one's own kind" has been strengthened or "grown" in Mencian terms. The point here is that this sort of crafting enables the growing, and it is not difficult to see how the growth of compassion helps to moderate desires for the self's gratification.[19]

I do not want to claim too much for the scientific study of meditation. All we have now is an interesting set of clues that need further exploration, both philosophically and scientifically. It is not clear how much self-regulation emotional self-awareness can confer, or what other psychological, social, and cultural conditions need to be in place if it is to be effective. The empirical study of master meditators does not investigate whether they are more likely to respond to real-life cry of distress. The paired Lieberman-Creswell experiments may show a way toward a kind of self-regulation, but that is at best a necessary condition of compassion, certainly not a sufficient one.

[19] It may seem strange to some that I am suggesting the possibility of Buddhist meditation as a moral cultivation practice, the main outlines of which have been laid down by Confucian thinkers. However, much of the rationale for Confucian criticism of Buddhism—that it encourages a kind of self-regarding concern to eliminate one's own suffering—does not apply to Buddhist mindfulness practices aimed at cultivating compassion. WANG Yangming 王陽明, the neo-Confucian with avowed roots in Mencius' thought, moreover, practiced sitting meditation to help clear away the clouds of selfish desire (another metaphor that is incompatible with the other Confucian metaphors if taken to portray the whole of moral cultivation but that has its place if not so taken). We may see the continuity of this practice with Mencian reflection, and here again, WANG Yangming's neo-Confucian metaphysics need not tag along. Moreover, Xunzi's appropriation of Daoist concepts of "emptiness" (*xu* 虛, not allowing what is already in the mind interfere with what is being received in the mind), "single-mindedness" (*yi* 一, not letting one thing in the mind interfere with another thing in the mind), and "stillness" (*jing* 靜, not allowing dreams and fantasies to bring disorder to awareness) (K 21.5d, [3] 104) resonates with qualities of mind associated with Buddhist mindfulness.

On a more general level, what some of the evidence suggests is that effective moral cultivation may be the sort of complex process that involves growing emotional dispositions along the lines laid out by biology, but in ways that are highly relational and contextualized over time, and that simultaneously involve crafting a self through self-discipline that allows the growth of morally congenial emotions such as compassion along natural directions. Though I have focused on compassion and desires for gain and sensual gratification in this section, there are other desires and emotions relevant to the interweaving of adorning, growing, and crafting that need to be explored. For example, shame over the parts of oneself that need restraint but are not yet restrained can lead not only to increased effort at self-regulation, but also seeking out sources of deep satisfaction in activities made possible by self-regulation.

3.6 What the Metaphors Give Us and What They Don't

I have argued that adornment, sprout, and craft metaphors need not be regarded so much as competitors but as illuminating different dimensions of moral cultivation. In fact, we really have not found better metaphors than the ones given by early Confucian philosophy. To support this point, I shall briefly present in contrast two models of the innate basis for morality in contemporary Western theory. Consider the model of innate universal moral grammar that is inspired by Chomsky (Hauser, Young, and Cushman 2008; Mikhail 2007, 2011). According to this model, just as we (supposedly) have innate universal principles of grammar of which we are not consciously aware, we have implicit nonconscious knowledge of certain moral principles, their influence revealed only in the patterns of moral judgments people make when prompted to respond to certain moral dilemmas. One such innate principle, according to Hauser, is the "intention principle": that harm intended as the means to a goal is morally worse than equivalent harm foreseen as the side effect of a goal. A major weakness of the "moral grammar" model is that rather specific moral principles are loaded into the innate with no informative genealogy of how it got there, as opposed to conflicting moral principles that have their defenders.[20] Moreover, the grammar is presented as a kind of unchanging form that is filled in by different natural moral languages. There is no indication that it can change in response to learning and other kinds of interaction with the environment.

For another comparative example, consider Jonathan Haidt's theory of moral "foundations" (e.g., Haidt and Graham 2007). He holds there are different types of moral "intuitions" such as care/harm, fairness/cheating, and so on. A problem with the "foundations" metaphor is that its metaphorical import is, like that of the metaphor of moral grammar, inert. It suggests the innate as a static base upon which learning and culture build. In fact, Haidt acknowledges that moral development has the more dynamic and interactional characteristics that are highlighted by the Chinese metaphors, but my point precisely is about the fruitfulness of the Chinese metaphors in drawing our attention to

[20] Substantial percentages of the respondents to the dilemmas posed by Hauser did not conform to the patterns of moral judgment supposedly showing the influence of the intention principle. In response to two variations of a dilemma, for example, 45% and 28% did not make judgments about moral dilemmas that were consistent with the intention principle (Hauser et al. 2008: 107–144). If the intention principle is an innate principle of moral grammar, one needs an explanation for these percentages. For an introduction to the ways in which the grammar model has been critiqued, see Dupoux and Jacob 2007.

these characteristics. The "foundations" metaphor is an inappropriate frame for whatever insights Haidt has into the interaction between the given and unlearned on the one hand and the acquired and learned on the other. Another metaphor Haidt has used more recently is of the innate as a "first draft," with culture and learning playing roles in the rewriting (Haidt 2012). This metaphor has a weakness complementary to the foundations metaphor. Instead of implying that the innate is a static foundation upon which culture builds, it is now unclear how the innate interacts with and potentially has a constraining effect on how culture transforms human psychology. First drafts, as we writers all know, can be drastically rewritten. Again, this cannot be what Haidt really means, but that is why the metaphor is a weak one.

4 Conclusion

I have followed through the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, and the *Xunzi* the ways in which conceptions of moral cultivation are expressed and developed through the metaphors of adorning, crafting, water flowing downward, and growing sprouts. If each of these metaphors is taken to portray the entire process of cultivation, and as competitive with the others, each will fail to capture the diversity and complexity of human nature and how it interacts with experience, culture, and conscious, deliberate efforts to change the self. However, within each of these seminal texts we can see how different metaphors are deployed or single metaphors deployed differently in order to capture different aspects of self-cultivation. Sometimes we strengthen and channel natural motivations that are congenial to morality; sometimes we restrain (but perhaps also satisfy in due measure) natural motivations that are in tension with or sometimes in outright conflict with morality. Sometimes we adorn; sometimes we craft; sometimes we grow; sometimes we weed. If we take the different metaphors as corresponding to different aspects of human nature and self-cultivation, we get a picture that connects with some of the best of the human sciences available to us today.

The Chinese metaphors bring to our attention the relational and holistic aspects of cultivation. It is not just discovering or unfolding what lies within the person, but giving and getting nurture, engaging in and being helped to regulate and modulate one's desires and emotions, reflecting on and focusing on some of the objects of desire and emotions while turning one's attention away from others. It is cultivating the self with others and within social practices such as ritual that regularizes and gives concrete expression to respect, concern, and love. Through social practices such as ritual, culture interacts with biology to contribute to moral cultivation of individuals. That culture's influence is transmitted through the activity of individuals within practices leads to another useful characteristic of these metaphors: they draw attention to human agency—not just to the people and groups who form the environment in which a person's ethical qualities are being cultivated, but to the agency of that very person. The person who possesses the sprouts must herself cultivate them through reflection. The person who adorns and crafts his own human stuff must assiduously observe the rituals and understand the standards of righteousness and the way they underpin the right form and content of the rituals. The Confucian metaphors highlight the agency of the person in whom ethical cultivation is taking place because the project of the Confucians is practical and not simply to understand moral development. Further, Xunzi's

development of the craft metaphor in particular rightly draws our attention to our socio-ethical practices and norms as things that can be well- or ill-fitted to the human material we have to work with and to see whether we can develop better tools for reshaping what needs to be reshaped. The Confucian metaphors do all this for us.

What the metaphors cannot do is confirm themselves. We formulate theories about the nature of moral cultivation with their help. Of course the early Confucians sometimes filled out their metaphors with assertions that do conflict. How much of the cognitive content that goes into morality is unlearned and embedded somehow in human nature? I read Mencius as answering that quite a lot of content is embedded in the sprouts, like their DNA. I read Xunzi as claiming that much and perhaps all of it is created by human beings to solve the problems created by their nature, although their *xing* and the availability of resources to satisfy human desire place strong constraints on what can be created that will actually solve the problems. It is up to us to see whether theories with positions on all the important questions provide good explanations. This is why I have drawn on contemporary science, not to provide definitive confirmation (because the relevant science is simply too young to even approach that goal), but to suggest that further inquiry is very promising. What I hope to have supported is the rather surprising idea that early Confucian philosophy and Western science have deep affinities when the subject is moral cultivation.

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