OPTIMISM (le 樂) AND ACTIVISM (wei 偽): ESTABLISHING THE CONFUCIAN WAY THROUGH RENXING 人性

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In recent years, there has been considerable controversy over the notion of xing 性 as it appears in the Mencius and in the Xunzi. The controversy has mostly revolved around the questions whether xing refers to a universal human nature or not, and whether their notions of shan 善 and e 惡 can be accurately characterized as 'good' and 'evil'. In this paper, the issue will be approached differently, and the issue of xing's universal or non-universal scope largely ignored as unproductive. Instead, it will be argued that a more productive approach is to view Mencius' and Xunzi's differing claims about the quality of xing of human beings as reflecting their different practical considerations of how best to establish the Confucian way. The Mencian emphasis, then, on the goodness of human beings is an attempt to resist cynicism and defeatism in a time in which wars and horrors were common, and to maintain a belief in the possibility of realizing a harmonious and peaceful society: Mencius underscores the optimistic spirit in the philosophy initiated by Confucius. On the other hand, Xunzi's claim about the problematic or unruly tendencies in the human xing are possibly resistances to a kind of thinking that celebrates passive conformity to natural processes: Xunzi emphasizes the active element in Confucius' thought. Optimism and activism are both integral features of the Confucian spirit. Hence it is misleading to regard Mencius and Xunzi as contradicting each other in their divergent claims about xing. Since their claims rather rest on different practical considerations, they merely emphasise different aspects of Confucius' thought, and, taken together, rather complement each other.

It is often held that xing 性, as it occurs in the Mencius, and in the slightly earlier Zhongyong, refers to a universal and given human nature, and some commentators have celebrated this discovery as a direct gateway to a Western dialogue on human nature and thus, presumably, to the smoother Chinese adoption of seemingly inviolable (Western) values such as human or individual rights. Mencius' claim that the human being is "good" (shan 善) by

¹ E. g., Bloom, who claims that Mencius' arguments about xing 性 are "unfailingly inclusive and always emphasize what human beings in general are like." (p. 23) She is, however, not arguing for some kind of fixed or unchangeable human nature, as she also holds that "the Mencian concept of xing is best understood as dynamic and developmental rather than static." (p. 31) Consider, however, Wing-tsit Chan who says that "in pointing to the moral principle which is common in our minds, [Mencius] is pointing to what amounts to the Natural Law" (p. 56).

nature (xing 性) certainly calls to mind Rousseau's "noble savage" and appears as a claim meant to apply to all human beings by virtue of their biological humanness.

While this paper concentrates on the debate between Mencius and Xunzi on renxing, it will largely ignore the currently popular issue of its universal or non-universal scope. Instead, I will approach the issue differently, and argue that their disagreement stems from their divergent views of what is a more appropriate or expedient method to realize the Confucian mode of thinking. Thus, Mencius and Xunzi are both trying to reinforce the establishment of a Confucian tradition as such by emphasizing different elements intrinsic to it. To Mencius, then, the universality of his claim as such is of no significant importance, but the claim identifies itself with a certain way of optimism or motivational thinking that is characteristic for the philosophy of Confucius. Xunzi, on the other hand, far from being a pessimist, as is sometimes held, sees serious practical shortcomings in Mencius' thesis and, in this regard, emphasizes a different aspect of Confucius' thought, namely effort or activism.

Most would agree that the core value concepts of Confucianism are primarily the following four: communal humanity (ren 仁), the sense of appropriateness (yi 義), ritual propriety (li 禮) and wisdom (zhi 智). These are all frequently brought up in the Analects. It is, however, especially in the Mencius that these are identified, combined and presented as constituting the key concepts. In fact, they are so important that Mencius appears to convey them as belonging to the natural make-up of the human being, or at least of the cultivated human being:

Whilst a vast territory and a large population are what cultivated persons desire, their joy (le 樂) consists not merely in this. Whilst taking a stand in the center of the world and bringing peace to the people between the four seas is what cultivated persons take joy in, their natural dispositions (xing 性) do not consist merely in this. As for these natural dispositions of cultivated persons, great deeds do not add to them, nor do straitened circumstances detract from them. This is because they have already been allotted these tendencies. To their natural dispositions belong communal humanity (ren 仁), appropriateness (yi 義), the observance of ritual propriety (li 禮) and wisdom (zhi 智), which are rooted in their heart-minds (xin 心). These manifest themselves in the mildness of their faces, amplify themselves in their backs and extend to their limbs, which, in turn, instruct them without uttering a single word.

On clarifying what he means by this, Mencius says, in a most difficult passage involving a number of complex notions:

Considering their spontaneous (re)actions (qing 情), [human beings] are capable of becoming good (shan 善). That is what I mean by good. As for their becoming not good (bu shan 不善), it is not the fault of their (natural) endowments (cai 才). People all have a sense (xin 心) for compassion; people all have a sense for shame; people all have a sense for respect; people all have a sense for distinguishing between right and wrong. The sense for compassion constitutes communal humanity (ren 仁); the sense for shame

² Mencius, 7A.21.

constitutes appropriateness (vi 義); the sense for respect constitutes the observance of ritual propriety (li 禮); the sense for distinguishing between right and wrong constitutes wisdom (zhi 智). Communal humanity, appropriateness, the observance of ritual propriety and wisdom are infused in us from the outside – we already have them.³

In this passage, I translate qing 情, which is otherwise often translated as "emotions" or "fact," as "spontaneous (re)actions." Qing is here applied or, rather, observed as a test for the quality of xing. For something to be observed, however, it has to be observable, and thus it is unlikely that Mencius is referring to emotions per se or to something internal. It rather seems to indicate how people act or react to events without deliberation, such as in Mencius' well known example of how people spontaneously react when seeing a child falling into a well. 5

Whether Mencius is proposing a universal theory of human nature or not, he is clearly establishing a connection, in line with the ideas expressed in the *Zhongyong*, between the human being's moral capacities and the natural realm. *Qing*, indicating the quality of *xing*, flows from *xin*, the heart-mind, which I chose to translate in a functional manner above as "sense." In his discussion of *renxing*, Mencius is responding to other thinkers who claim, like Gongduzi, that *renxing* is neutral, neither good or bad, or, like others, that it can become both good and bad, or, like others yet, that some people's *xing* are good and others' bad.⁶

In order to appreciate Mencius' claim of the *shan*-ness of *renxing*, one must consider the philosophical and social context in which he makes the claim. It was surely important to Mencius, in his continuing Confucius' philosophical and educational mission, to establish the genuine possibility of realizing the "goodness" or harmonious socialization of human beings. The Confucian philosophy is a philosophy of "realization" in the dynamic sense of the word. It seeks to motivate rather than to ascertain or discover. Wisdom or knowledge (*zhi* 智) is always primarily of a practical nature. It involves perspicacity for the circumstances at hand and the ability to act upon them in the most fruitful or appropriate manner. Hence it is also

³ Mencius, 6A.6.

⁴ Cf. commentary in Zhuzi jicheng, vol. 1, Mengzi zhenyi, 443.

⁵ In Mencius, 2A.6. One could of course argue, on an etymological basis, that "emotion" implies "motion," and therefore refers both to internal and external processes. However, there is a tendency in the West to think of emotions in an essentialist manner similarly to "feelings." We speak, for instance, of people who "don't express their emotions." Bruya suggests an interpretation of qing 情 coming close to mine, at least as it occurs in the Analects 13.4, where he explains it as "reacting (not just acting) sincerely to circumstances without duplicity" (p. 82). When he discusses its use in the Mencius, however, he opts for "spontaneous emotions" (p. 88) in an attempt to establish the absence of a semantic divide between Mencius and Xunzi in terms of qing. In my view, the terms "emotions" and "spontaneous emotions" still lack the implication of real action that I see present in Mencius' use of qing. This implication is clearer yet in the well-known saying (chengyu 成語), admittedly owing its origin to a much later date, or the sixth century AD: qing bu zi jin 情不自禁, which expresses the inability not to act (and thus react) in a certain way.

⁶ Mencius, 6A.6.

said in the *Zhongyong* that wisdom consists in bringing things to completion.⁷ There is also a particularly illuminating passage in the *Analects* where Confucius says that wisdom consists in devoting oneself to what is appropriate for the people, and to show respect for ghosts and spirits while at the same time distancing oneself from them.⁸

Confucius lived in a time in which the Zhou dynasty had already undergone a significant disintegration, and war and violence escalated between the remaining states. Mencius, moreover, found himself in a society where wars were even more frequent, resulting in, as D.C. Lau puts it, a growing cynicism towards morality which is implicit in Legalist doctrines based on a view of man as purely egoistic and motivated solely by the thought of reward and punishment. With the prevalent atmosphere Mencius was in profound disagreement. In his view man is basically a moral creature.

I would tend to agree with Lau that Mencius held the human being to be "basically a moral creature." Of importance, however, is the manner in which he held this view. It is certainly not a factual or teleological claim parallel to the Aristotelian one of human beings being social animals by nature. Confucius himself says in the *Analects* that human beings "are similar in their natural dispositions (xing 性), but differ in their habits (xi 智)." This claim invites the policies characteristic of Confucius and his immediate followers, first, that the emphasis is on practice, learning and personal cultivation rather than on discovery; and second, no less important in this context, that what is crucial is an attitude of optimism. This latter point requires some further explanation.

During Confucius' time, cynical or pessimist views were not restricted to Legalist thoughts. Chen Jingpan refers to the "pessimists" during the time of Confucius as "those who grew weary of the deplorable conditions of the time, and felt no hope of salvation for the corrupt social order." Some of these are brought up in book 18 of the *Analects*, for instance

⁷ Zhongyong, 25. The Shuowen lexicon defines zhi through its components, the "mouth" (kou □), implying communication, and "implementing" (shi 矢), both of which constitute the semantic of the character. Thus, a "know-how" is already implicit in the Chinese notion of knowing. In ancient Chinese thought, moreover, there was always a close relationship between knowledge (zhi) and action (xing) (cf. Ge Rongjin, 413ff). The intimacy of this relationship found its culmination in the philosophy of Wang Yangming (1472–1529) who explicitly maintained "the continuity of knowledge and action" (zhixingheyi 知行合一). In his Instructions for Practical Living (Chuan xi lu 傳習錄) he says: "Knowledge is the design of action, action is the workmanship of knowledge. Knowledge is the beginning of action, action is the completion of knowledge. In a particular point of time, although one only speaks of knowledge, it already has action contained in it, and although one only speaks of action, it already has knowledge contained in it" (Cited in Chen Lai, 414).

⁸ Analects, 6.22. See also Ames' and Hall's discussion of the strong practical emphasis contained in the notion of zhi, Focusing the Familiar, 84f.

⁹ Lau, Mencius, 11.

¹⁰ Analects, 17.2.

¹¹ Chen Jingpan, Confucius as a Teacher, 76.

Jie Ni, whose name can be translated as "Boldly Sunk," and who says, cynically, to Zilu upon hearing that he is Confucius' disciple: "The whole world is flooded in disorder, and who is going to change it? You follow one who avoids some people, but would it not be better to follow those who avoid the world altogether?" When Zilu reports this conversation to Confucius, the Master responds, as it says, interestingly, with frustration or disappointment (wu 無): "It is impossible to associate with birds and beasts [like the hermits purport to do]. If not with the people, who are of my kind, with whom shall I then associate? If the proper way (dao $\ddot{\Xi}$) reigned in the world, I would not go about changing it." 14

It is notable that Confucius does not comment on Jie Ni's lamentation that the "world is flooded in disorder" — he is disappointed in Jie Ni's defeatism, his conviction that nothing can be done and that it is best to withdraw from the world altogether. Elsewhere, also in book 18, which, in fact, appears to be dedicated to the defeatists of the time, he lists names of seven outstanding individuals whose talents were "lost to the people" as they all retired into privacy from the world. Moreover, when Confucius, riding his carriage, hears as "the madman of Chu," another recluse, sings a cynical poem about the futility of doing anything at all in this doomed world, Confucius gets off his carriage with the intention of speaking with him, but in vain as the "madman" disappears. The frequent reference to the recluses and Confucius' remarks about them indicates that he admired their talents and abilities, and therefore deplored their decision to retire from the world instead of participating in his quest for stability and harmony.

In this apparently wide-ranging atmosphere of despair and cynicism, Confucius describes himself as "a person who is so eager (fen 憤) that he forgets to eat, who is so optimistic (le 樂)

¹² Following Ames and Rosemont Jr., 214.

¹³ Analects, 18.6.

¹⁴ Analects, 18.6.

[&]quot;worthy" (xian 賢) e.g. Bo Yi and Shu Qi in 7.15 and Liu Xiahui in 15.14. There are also frequent references to these as sages (shengren 聖人) in the Mencius. Moreover, in the Analects 14.37, Confucius speaks of different kinds of "worthy persons (xian zhe 賢者) [having] resigned from the world," and then adds at the end that "those who have done this are seven persons." In the Lunyu zhengyi (Zhuzi jicheng, 1: 324) these persons are said to be the above-mentioned Jie Ni and his recluse companion Chang Ju (Analects, 18.6); the old man, or Zhang ren (18.7); Shi Men (14.38), whose name is usually and possibly mistakenly taken to refer to a place called Stone Gate; He Kui (14.39), most likely also a name but usually translated as someone carrying a basket; the border-official at Yi, or Yi feng ren (3.24); and the madman of Chu (18.5). The Han dynasty commentator Zheng Xuan (127–200) argues that the number seven is an error and that there were actually ten persons, namely Bo Yi, Shu Qi, Yu Zhong, Liu Xiahui and Shao Lian (five of the seven mentioned in 18.8); Jie Ni and Chang Ju (18.6); the madman of Chu; the basket carrier, or He Kui; and lastly another referred to in 18.7 as He Diao, also normally translated as "basket carrier" (cited in Zhuzi jicheng, 1: 324). It is further tempting to think of the seven persons as the ones mentioned in 18.8.

that he forgets to worry, and who does not even realize that old age is impending." Above all, Confucius emphasized the importance of motivation for the ability to learn and to work on the improvement of society. As long as one can inspire this motivation in oneself, there is nothing preventing that person to become a cultivated person, a *junzi* 君子. Confucius makes clear that his admired abilities and wisdom are far from being inborn, but have come about through his fondness of the ancient culture and thus from his untiring efforts in extracting wisdom from it. In a well known passage from the same book, he says that he never refuses instruction to those who are only able to afford a piece of dried meat, the most humble of gifts in ancient Chinese society, implying that it is the willingness to learn that is the most important factor. Is

It is this optimistic ethos or spirit of Confucius, blended with the Zhongyong's implication of cosmic relations, which Mencius inherits and carries further. Most likely, the importance of optimism (le 樂) was underscored by the "Five Actions" (Wuxing 玉行) essay, which may have been written by Confucius' grandson, Zisi, who may have written the Zhongyong, too. ¹⁹ This essay emphasizes several times that excellence or moral power (de 德), necessary to implement improvements, cannot be attained without an optimistic attitude (le). ²⁰ This is what makes out Mencius' discussion of renxing. He makes it quite clear that anyone has the capacity to become even a sage (shengren 聖人). In one place he says that all one has to do in order to become a sage is to model oneself after the ancient sage-kings Yao and Shun; in other words, appropriate the cultural tradition initiated by them and carried further by Confucius. ²¹ Elsewhere he says that "the sages and I are of the same kind" and that what constitutes our difference is that "the sages were simply the first to grasp our common sensibilities (xin 心)," likening the sages to the famous cook Yi Ya whose culinary excellence consisted in his grasping the general preferences of the human palate. ²²

To consider the *renxing* as either evil or variable between individual human beings would, for Mencius, in both cases be a kind of defeatism. On the other hand, by regarding the *xing* as

¹⁶ Analects, 7.19. I follow Chen Jingpan (p. 79) in understanding le 樂 here as "optimism." Depending on the context, it can of course also simply mean "joy" or "happiness." However, even these notions imply a joyful outlook on things, and thus an optimistic attitude. Note also that the modern Chinese for "optimism" is leguan 樂觀, literally a joyful perspective or view.

¹⁷ Analects, 7.20.

¹⁸ Analects, 7.7. Cf. also 7.8, where Confucius stresses the importance of his students' sharing the eagerness (fen 慎) that he ascribes to himself in 7.19 as quoted above.

¹⁹ The "Wuxing" essay was excavated from a tomb in Mawangdui, Hebei Province, for the first time in 1973, and again at Guodian, Hunan Province, in 1994.

²⁰ "Wuxing," 78f.

²¹ Mencius, 4A.2.

²² Mencius, 7A.7. See also 4B-32 where he says, "Yao and Shun were the same as other people," and 6B.2 where he affirms that anyone is able to become a Yao or a Shun.

containing sprouts that may enable human beings, and all human beings, to become good, however, the Confucian motivational factor is in place. Despite the turmoil, horrors and misery caused by the constant wars in Mencius' days, he maintains the Confucian hope for the realization of a better society. This, however, is not to say that his idea of renxing is a pure pragmatic construct. It entails the firm conviction that if given the right conditions and environment, in a manner similar to agricultural products, human beings will develop their best abilities as they grow up. What are the best abilities of agricultural products? That they nourish people. What are the best abilities of people? That they nourish society. An ideal person, indeed, a cultivated person or junzi, let alone a sage or shengren, is one who grows up having affection for the people who enabled him to grow up, and then extends this affection to the larger society, such that he or she will contribute to the maintenance, growth and development of that society. It is here that Mencius introduces the interplay between xing 性, the original natural endowments or tendencies, and ming no, often translated as "destiny," but probably more appropriately understood as the "forces of circumstances." These are two interacting sides of the same process.

Mencius said:

"The disposition of the mouth toward good taste, of the eyes toward beauty, of the ears toward pleasant sounds, of the nose toward fragrances, and of the four limbs towards ease and rest are cases of xing 性; yet, because these depend on ming 命, cultivated persons do not refer to them as their xing. The tendency of communal humanity $(ren \subset)$ to characterize the relationship between father and son, of the sense of appropriateness [yi 義] to characterize the relationship between prince and minister, of ritual propriety (li 禮) to characterize the relationship between guest and host, of wisdom (zhi 知) to characterize persons of excellence (xianren 賢人), of sages (shengren 聖人) to follow the way of tian 天 are cases of ming; yet, because these depend on xing, cultivated persons do not refer to them as their ming."

Xu Fuguan²⁵ has pointed out that this passage should be understood in combination with the following:

Mencius said:

"Seek and you shall obtain it; let go and you shall lose it. If this is the case, then seeking is useful for obtaining and that which is sought is within yourself. But provided that there is a proper way of seeking, and yet obtaining depends on the forces of circumstance [you ming 有命], then in such a case seeking is of no use for obtaining, and the sought for lies outside of yourself."²⁶

²³ Following Hall and Ames, Thinking Through Confucius, 208ff.

²⁴ Mencius, 7B.24. I follow Mengzi zhengyi (Zhuzi jicheng, 1: 582f.) in understanding the dispositions of the human senses as towards good or pleasant tastes, smells, etc.

²⁵ Xu Fuguan, 145.

²⁶ Mencius, 7A.3.

In this passage, Mencius is referring to the heart-mind or what he takes to form the core of human sensibility (xin 心). The problem is here that if we do not locate in some sense the excellent qualities of human beings within ourselves, then whether they develop or not will not depend on us but on external circumstances. Ming does not imply destiny in a strong, deterministic way, but it nevertheless points to forces that are ultimately outside our control. Thus, although it belongs to the natural disposition of human beings to desire good food, beauty, rest and ease, and so on, our success in satisfying such desires depends significantly on the force of circumstances. Despite all our hard work and determination, it takes no philosopher to tell us that our goals can easily be frustrated by some unforeseen occurrences in our immediate environment, and that we may not reap what we have sown. On the other hand, the development of our moral capacities depends mostly on our own efforts. Naturally, environment and the force of circumstances play an important role, and it is unrealistic to expect, as Mencius also points out, that people will dedicate themselves to self-cultivation if they do not have proper means of support.²⁷ Nevertheless, as he also notes, "great persons are those who do not lose their child-like sentiments" or heart-minds (xin 心), despite all the hardships in their circumstances.²⁸ This is a matter of effort and determination. If, on the other hand, one's moral development were left wholly to the force of circumstance, then one would not be compelled to take responsibility for one's mode of action and could always find excuses in the environment — the sought for would lie outside oneself. Human life can thus be seen as a negotiation or dynamic interaction between xing and ming, both of which exert strong influences on the human being, without, as is typical in Chinese thought, either of them dominating the other.²⁹

Mencius can thus be credited with having provided an important and apparently needed link between the motivational moral philosophy of Confucius and the cosmological forces without thereby having forced them into some kind of categories of necessity or determinism. Xunzi, however, largely dismantles this relationship.

Xunzi is best known for his claim, contradicting Mencius, that *renxing* is not "good" (*shan* 善) but "evil" (e 惡). If Mencius is an optimist, this would appear to reveal Xunzi as a "defeatist" or a "pessimist." However, as many commentators have noted, the asymmetry is

²⁷ Mencius, 3A.3.

²⁸ Mencius, 4B.12.

²⁹ Perhaps a good indicator of the Chinese conception of life as a process of dynamic interaction between one's natural makeup and external occurrences is that in modern Chinese the word *xingming* 性命 means precisely "life."

³⁰ Most likely such a perception of Xunzi as a pessimist was the most important factor in his being regarded by Han Yu (768–824) and in fact all the subsequent neo-Confucians as unworthy of belonging to the "correct transmission" of the Confucian tradition. Han Yu and later Cheng Yi (1033–1107) both specifically attacked Xunzi for his claims about *renxing* and established Mencius' notion as the "orthodox" Confucian doctrine (cf. Chan, 450ff. and 567).

not perfect here. Kurtis Hagen, for instance, has recently argued that Xunzi's slogan $xing\ e$ 性 惡, usually rendered "human nature is evil," does not adequately reflect his position, and that a more appropriate English translation would be: "Original human nature is problematic." Further, according to the Japanese Sinologist Oomuro Mikio:

While he [Xunzi] concludes that human nature is bad, he agrees with Mencius' doctrine of the goodness of human nature at its root. At least, one piece of evidence is the optimistic ethical doctrine that ... if one accumulates virtue by means of ritual propriety, even the ordinary person on the street may be cultivated into a sage.³²

According to this view, Xunzi held *renxing* to be good in the sense of being transformable, which, in my opinion, is to stretch his position somewhat. Xunzi is quite explicit in his rejection of Mencius' conception of *renxing*. What seems probable, however, is that he disliked its passive implication of personal cultivation as a mere drawing out of the natural, because it seemed to imply a position similar to the Daoist, especially Zhuangzian, one of following nature or *tian* 天, a view with which Xunzi was familiar and which he criticized explicitly.³³ In any case, Xunzi clearly wants to emphasize that moral cultivation requires active effort (*wei* 偽) and does not come about "just like water flows downwards." At least in this respect, Mencius appears to Xunzi as something of an armchair- or, more appropriately, "mat-philosopher": Mencius "expounded this while sitting on his mat, but would his error not be obvious if he rose up, proving unable to establish it or showing its general application in practice?"³⁴

Hence, Xunzi's disagreement with Mencius rests on his accentuated focus on practice and discipline rather than on original constitution, and on the plasticity of natural things, humans included. He sets this tone right at the beginning of the work bearing his name: "Learning must never be halted. Blue dye is taken from the indigo plant, but it is bluer than the indigo. Ice is made from water, but it is colder than water." The same applies to human beings' moral qualities: they derive from renxing but are an improvement of it through conscious exertion. Interestingly, the Wuxing essay, although being older, adds a Xunzian activism to a Mencian optimism by saying that "if goodness (shan 善) is not acted upon (wei 為), there will

³¹ Hagen, "Artifice and Virtue in the *Xunzi*," 209. A. S. Cua has also noted that "Xunzi's remark that 'human nature is bad' ... is quite inadequate as it stands for distinguishing his view from that of Mencius." (Cua, 821)

³² Cited in Hagen, "Artifice and Virtue in the *Xunzi*," 209f. Knoblock (3: 139) also notes that "later scholars have, from time to time, suggested that their [Mencius' and Xunzi's] views are compatible."

³³ Cf. Eno who expounds a similar thesis, 149f.

³⁴ Xunzi, 23.3.

³⁵ Xunzi, 1.1.

³⁶ Xunzi, 19.6.

be no progress; if excellence (de 德) has no determination (zhi 志), it will not accomplish anything."³⁷

Li 理 understood here as "pattern" or "coherence" is inclusive of the more narrowly defined li 禮 as ritual. It entails being aware of those constitutive relationships that condition each thing and which, through patterns of correlation, make the world meaningful and intelligible. 40

For Xunzi, it is the development of the triad of li 理, li 禮 and yi 義 that produces the cultivated person. Why yi? Because it is through the ability of making appropriate distinctions between things that meaning is constructed. Xunzi says quite explicitly that "yi is 'to pattern' [li 理], hence (proper) action follows." Yi is in fact the mediator between the greater patterns of things, li 理, and the traditional patterns of conduct, li 禮. Yi could thus be understood as the "sensibility" necessary for cultural adaptation and development, for effecting the appropriate changes in social patterns responding to the constant process of change taking place in the greater patterns. Without such active changes, the tradition

³⁷ Wuxing, 78, §3. The wei here used is admittedly the one without the "human" radical, but these two are in this case synonymous and interchangeable.

³⁸ Xunzi, e.g. 17.9.

³⁹ Eno, 152. In his "The Concepts of *Li* and *Lei* in the *Xunzi*," Hagen argues, most convincingly, for an interpretation of Xunzi as a "constructivist"; that is to say, that he takes the categories of society mainly as social constructions for practical purposes rather than discovered analogies with the cosmic realm, as many interpreters have maintained.

⁴⁰ Hall and Ames, The Democracy of the Dead, 157.

⁴¹ Yi 義, on the basis of its etymological relation to a "self" or an "I," could also be taken to mean "signification" or "personalization." Cf. Hall and Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, 89ff.

⁴² Xunzi, 27.21.

stagnates and fails to fulfill its role of effecting human flourishing. By leaving everything to nature, as Mencius sometimes seems to imply, self-improvement is impossible, and thus also the improvement of society.

Optimism and activism are both strong and important characteristics of the Confucian spirit, no less now than before. A positive view of the relationship between human beings and their world, a belief in the possibility of preserving the good and improving the bad, and a willingness to actively engage oneself for the realization of such an end are all major features of Confucian self-understanding. There has never been a distinction between "theoretical" and "applied" Confucianism – in fact, there has never been proper knowledge without action, as best exemplified in Wang Yangming's notion of zhixingheyi 知行合一. There is therefore no contradiction between Mencius and Xunzi. In fact, they complement each other in their emphases. Optimism without activism, Xunzi might say, leads to heedless irresponsibility; activism without optimism, on the other hand, Mencius might say, leads to selfish disrespect for others, wars and horrors. Perhaps these two incomplete attitudes are precisely those that dominate our present world. Then perhaps there is still something to learn from Confucianism.

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OPTIMIZMAS (le) IR AKTYVUMAS (wei): KONFUCIANISTINIO KELIO TIESIMAS PADEDANT ŽMOGIŠKAJAI PRIGIMČIAI (renxing)

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Santrauka

Pastaraisiais metais itin daug ginčijamasi dėl žmogiškosios prigimties (xing) interpretavimo "Mengzi" ("Mencius") ir "Xunzi" veikaluose. Sinologų nuomonės daugiausia išsiskiria dėl klausimo, ar xing galima laikyti universalia prigimtimi, ar ne, ir ar žodžiai shan bei e gali būti suprantami kaip gėris ir blogis. Šiame straipsnyje problema formuluojama šiek tiek kitaip, o klausimas apie xing universalumą ar neuniversalumą gvildenamas nebus, nes laikomas neaktualiu. Čia bus bandoma parodyti, jog Mengzi ir Xunzi nuomonių apie žmogiškosios prigimties ypatumus skirtingumą veikiau lėmė jų visai kitoks praktinių aplinkybių, aktualinamų konfucianistinio kelio įgyvendinimą, suvokimas. Mengzi pabrėžė žmogaus prigimties gebėjimą pasipriešinti tuometinių karų ir negerovių pagimdytam ciniškumui bei susitaikymui su pralaimėjimais ir siekė įtikinti žmoniją, jog galimybė sukurti harmoningą bei taikią visuomenę yra įmanoma. Šitaip Mengzi pabrėžė Konfucijaus įkvėptą mąstymo optimizmą. O Xunzi pasisakymus apie žmogaus prigimties polinkį į chaotiškumą ar problemiškumą veikiau būtų galima paaiškinti kaip jo pasipriešinimą tai mąstymo krypčiai, kuri teigia pasyvų prisitaikymą prie gamtos procesų. Taigi Xunzi pabrėžia aktyvųjį Konfucijaus mąstymo aspektą. Konfucianizmo dvasiai yra būdingi ir optimizmas ir aktyvumas. Todėl skirtingas Mengzi ir Xunzi nuomonės tiesiog iškelia kitokius Konfucijaus mąstymo aspektus ir papildo viena kitą.

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